SPRING 2006

SMALL FARM QUARTERLY

Good Living and Good Farming – Connecting People, Land, and Communities

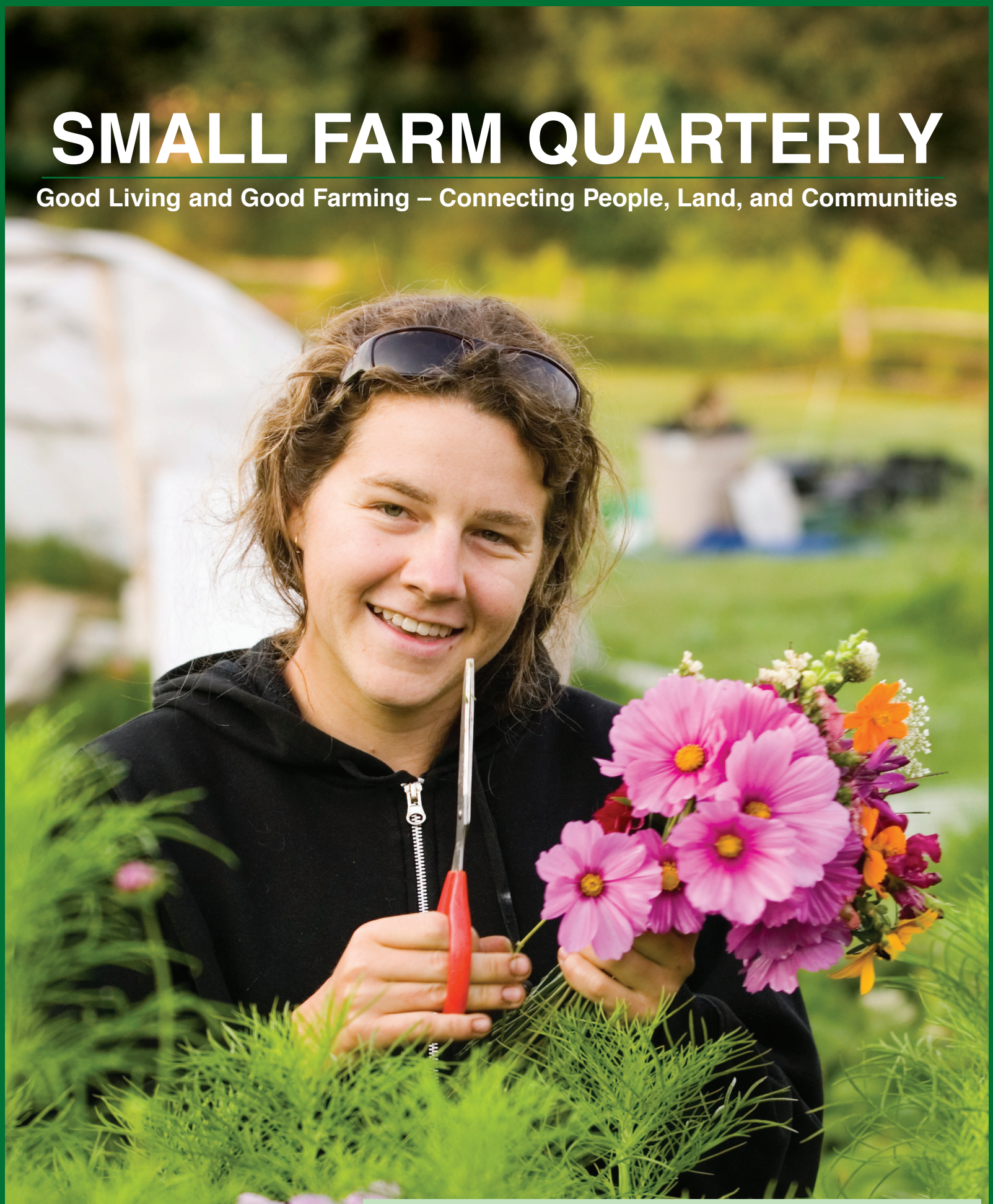

Photo by Jason Houston

Feature Articles

Supplement to Country Folks

SMALL FARM QUARTERLY - Spring 2006

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On our cover: Rory O'Dwyer, farmer, on a summer morning at Farm Girl Farm, North Egremont, MA. Photo by Jason Houston

SMALL FARM QUARTERLY

Good Farming and Good Living —
Connecting People, Land, and Communities

Small Farm Quarterly is for farmers and farm families — including spouses and children - who value the quality of life that smaller farms provide.

OUR GOALS ARE TO:

- Celebrate the Northeast region's smaller farms;
- Inspire and inform farm families and their supporters;
- Help farmers share expertise and opinions with each other; and
- Increase awareness of the benefits that small farms contribute to society and the environment.
- Share important research, extension, and other resources.

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- Celeste Carmichael, NYS 4-H Teen Program
- Madeleine Charney, New England Small Farm Institute
- Craig Cramer, Department of Horticulture, Cornell
- Janice Degni, CCE South Central NY Dairy Team
- Gary Goff, Cornell Natural Resources Department
- Joanna Green, Cornell Small Farms Program
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FROM THE EDITORS

Progress

In 2003 *Small Farm Quarterly* started as an idea. Initially it faced what seemed some insurmountable odds. The fact that it came together so quickly and fit so well is testament to being in the right place at the right time. However, there was much more to it than that. A group of good people agreed to take on even more responsibilities and we had help from places many weren't even aware of.

SFQ relies on the contributions of people who are all busy with other responsibilities as well. The magazine has been fortunate to receive articles from farmers, 4-H youth, Extension Educators, as well as USDA folks, and other contributors. No one gets paid to write. The help from Country Folks in publishing and distribution is appreciated with every issue; and with every issue we try to progress. Ultimately, YOU, the readers, determine SFQ's success.

In 2001 another publication, *Farming Magazine*, started up in Mt. Hope, Ohio. It too faced what seemed insurmountable odds and has survived and grown. Today its circulation encompasses much of the United States. David Kline and his wife Elsie, along with friends and family, edit *Farming Magazine*.

With this issue of SFQ we welcome a new regular contributor - David Kline. Many of you might already be familiar with David's books: *Great Possessions,* and *Scratching the Woodchuck*, along with many articles in many publications over the years. From his writings you might conclude his full-time past-time is the observation of nature. However, his passions are many, not the least of which are his faith, his family, his friends, and his farm.

David operates an organic dairy, which he farms with horses. About 40 Jerseys make up the milking herd. He is a strong advocate of management intensive grazing but also loves to plow. David strives to manage his farm in a way that optimizes the relationships of wild creations in an environment influenced by man.

We are very pleased to offer in this issue the first of David Kline's contributions to *Small Farm Quarterly*, entitled "Fringe Benefits." Anyone appreciating farming, nature and the great outdoors is in for a treat.

We are also delighted to present another new feature with this issue: the first of a series of photo essays by Berkshire County, MA photographer Jason Houston. Jason is an independent documentary photographer with over 15 years experience with a wide range of subjects. His most recent project on local and sustainable agriculture has included over 25 feature stories in publications including The New York Times Magazine, TIME, Orion Magazine, The Wall Street Journal, New York Magazine, NewFarm.org, Organic Gardener, Berkshire Living, and many others.

We are grateful to David Kline and Jason Houston, and to each and every contributor and reader, for helping to make *Small Farm Quarterly* such an inspiring, and rewarding project. Thank you.

Bill Henning and Joanna Green
SFQ Editorial Team members

CORNELL SMALL FARMS PROGRAM UPDATE

New Projects, New Staff, and New Ideas

By Anu Rangarajan

I used to look forward to winter as a time to slow down, take stock and recharge for the spring. Here at the Cornell Small Farms Program, however, this winter has been one of our busiest yet. New projects, new staff, and lots of new ideas!

SUPPORTING BEGINNING FARMER TRAINING

All around the Northeast, extension educators and other farm organizations conduct workshops focused on beginning farmers. These farmers can include those who are just starting to explore farming, those who recently started farming, or those who are been farming for some time but want to try some different enterprise.

Erica Frenay has joined the Program to figure out how we can best support these training efforts. A team of extension educators is working with Erica to review available beginning farmer materials, collect curriculum, develop a central on-line resource library, and prepare new materials to fill in gaps. To start, Erica has developed a new section of our website devoted to Beginning Farmer Resources (www.smallfarms.cornell.edu/pages/resources/beginning/index.cfm) and another section devoted to Farmer Profiles extracted from past issues of SFQ (www.smallfarms.cornell.edu/pages/resources/index.cfm). Check them out! This Beginning Farmer effort was funded by the NY State Department of Agriculture and Markets and the USDA Risk Management Agency.

ORGANIC AND SMALL DAIRY VIABILITY

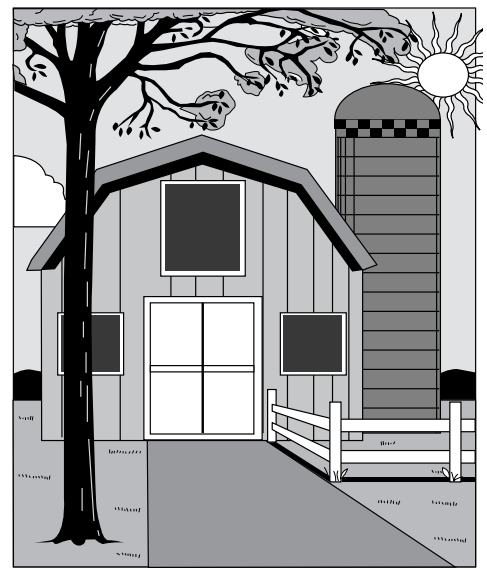
We also welcome Fay Benson, our new Organic and Small Dairy Educator. Prior to starting in extension, Fay operated a small dairy that transitioned to organic production. Now, he works as a grazing educator at Cortland County CCE. This winter, we received several grants from the New York Farm Viability Institute to enhance organic and small dairy viability. We are pleased that this funding will now allow Fay to devote time to statewide small and organic dairy issues, in collaboration with the Small Farm Program.

Fay will help lead the new NY Organic Dairy Ag Innovation Center. Over the next two years, the Center will bring together a group of farmers, processors, handlers and certifiers to consider strategies to increase organic milk production in the state. This 'Task Force' will also help focus future research, education, and investment to support organic dairy producers. Fay and Jacob Schuelke (farm business management educator in Cortland County) will also develop a series of workshops on farm business management specific to organic dairy. These workshops will be hosted in three different areas of NY, for farmers considering organic and those already transitioned.

Organic dairy is just one of several options farmers may consider to increase the profitability of their small dairies. Other approaches, such as grazing or on-farm processing, also have appeal. There are some dairy farmer discussion groups around the state that can help producers consider these options, but not everyone has access to a local discussion group. We want to know if distance learning technologies can help create 'virtual' discussion groups focused on value-added or farm management innovations. The advantage would be bringing together a 'learning community' without having to travel a long distance. Fay will be working with farmer groups around the state to develop a series of video-linked presentations and discussions.

RISK MANAGEMENT EDUCATION

Behind the scenes and some of the SFQ articles you have been reading lurks Craig Cramer, another new contributor to the Small Farm Program. Craig has worked in



the Department of Horticulture at Cornell for several years, supporting networking and outreach. In a past life, he served as an editor and writer for New Farm Magazine, published by Rodale Press. Craig is coordinating a series of articles on risk management for SFQ and helping us develop our own editing and writing skills (sponsored by the NY State Department of Agriculture and Markets and the USDA Risk Management Agency). Welcome Craig!

THANKS TO SFP PARTNERS

None of these projects would be possible without the close partnerships we enjoy with CCE Educators, farmers, Cornell colleagues, nonprofit organizations, and other agricultural service providers. It is these partnerships that help us realize our Mission, to celebrate and promote thriving small farms. Thank you!

Please feel free to contact Erica Frenay about our beginning farmer project (ejf5@cornell.edu), Fay Benson (afb3@cornell.edu) about our small and organic dairy grants, or Anu Rangarajan (ar47@cornell.edu) on any and all of our efforts.

How can I get Small Farm Quarterly?

Country Folks subscribers automatically receive SFQ four times a year at no extra cost. Country Folks is delivered weekly for $35 per year.

SFQ-only subscribers receive just the 4 issues of Country Folks that contain the SFQ insert for only $5 a year.

Cooperative Extension Associations and other organizations can offer their members a subscription to SFQ as a member benefit! Your organization collects the names, forwards them to Country Folks Subscriptions, and pays Country Folks just $2.50 for each subscriber. Country Folks mails out the copies.

Bulk orders: You can order multiple copies of any issue for just 10¢ a copy! Minimum order is 50. Orders must be placed at least 4 weeks before the publication date - Summer 2006 copies need to be ordered by June 10.

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SFQ T-Shirt Winners!

In last fall's issue of Small Farm Quarterly we sent out Reader Feedback cards to certain areas of our circulation. Many thanks to the more than 500 readers who returned cards. As promised, we will be sending an "I Love Small Farms" T-shirt to the lucky ten whose cards were drawn at random. The winners are:

- Mr. John Moyer, Middletown Spring, VT
- Thomas Worobey, Herkimer County, NY
- Rebecca Schuelke, Chenango County, NY
- Tom Holl, Chenango County, NY
- Keith Kraatz, Genesee County, NY
- Nelson Tillson, Winham County, VT
- Maurice D. Ouimet, Addison County, VT
- David Hume, Windsor County, VT
- Lawrence Murch, Cumberland County, ME
- J. Purdy, Greene County, NY

HOME AND FAMILY

On Raising Rural Kids

Safety First, Never Last

By Celeste Carmichael

"Have a future not a past, safety first -- never last." This, I've learned, is the mantra of folks who work in the field of agricultural safety. It is kind of a catchy little slogan, and I have caught myself repeating it more than once since I heard it not long ago.

THE GRIM STATISTICS

We all probably know that, across the board – regardless of where you live or what you do, injuries are the leading cause of death and disability from 1 year of age until 21 years of age. And, many of us – unfortunately – have personal stories that validate that statistic.

The seriousness of this concern is amplified for farm families - not because anyone is less cautious, but because the opportunity for risk is greater when there are machinery and animals around. In fact, it is estimated that 23,500 children are injured annually on the farm. As you might expect, fatal and nonfatal injuries to children on farms often involve tractors and other farm machinery, livestock, building structures and falls.

Similar statistics also plague the adults in farm families. A 2001 study out of Colorado State University found that the pressure of time and economy sometimes cause people to make riskier choices. The study acknowledged that farm families are "cautiously careless," often because of time constraints or experience (I've done that so many times and it was okay). Unfortunately one untimely accident can impact lives forever.

A PERSONAL STORY

While looking for someone to interview about this topic, I started talking with Michelle Thonesen, a student who is working with me this year as a program assistant. Michelle is a sophomore at Cornell who is studying Applied Economics and Management with a focus in Ag Business. She comes from Reedley, California – a place she describes as the fruit basket of the world. (Incidentally, I Googled Reedley…and sure enough, in case you were wondering, it IS the fruit basket of the world!)

Michelle's grandfather, uncles, and cousins all either own or manage farms – growing peaches, nectarines, plums, pluots (a cross between plums and apricots), wine grapes and oranges. Knowing of her farm background, I asked Michelle if her family took special precautions to help her live and work safely around the farm. It was then that she told me that this is an issue of great importance to her and her family, as her father died in a farm accident when she was five.

Her story is a powerful one. Writing this piece has certainly made me think (and cry)…and I hope that reading it helps to influence the safety decisions that you make. Lives are precious…safety first!

Q. What happened to your father?

A. I had to ask my brother because I never really knew what happened exactly. This is what he told me:

"Dad built a trailer that had two tandem axles and made it large enough to fit many tractors or even a large tractor with a sprayer on it. He would have to load the tractors one after another in order to get them all on to the trailer because it was a tilting trailer. The tilt action allowed the trailer to tilt back to make it easy to load and unload. When loading many small tractors he would have to start them all in-line and drive the back one to push all of them on so that the trailer would not tilt up after the first and not allow the others to be put on.

"When he was loading a fork-lift and two tractors, the fork-lift tire got stuck and the tractor ran up the back of the fork-lift and flipped. The cause of death was either asphyxiation or a broken neck. The steering wheel caught him at the neck. I know that it was quick and painless."

See, my dad was not just managing his farms but he was also managing farms for other people as well, so he had to move lots of equipment at one time. Our family was on vacation at the coast when it happened. My grandpa (my dad's dad) had to call my mom and tell her what happened.

Q. Did this affect your education decisions and career thoughts?

Cornell student Michelle Thonesen as a baby, with her father and big brother Neil. Her dad was killed in a tractor accident when she was five years old.

A. This has definitely affected our career choices (me and my brothers). My brother Neil (the oldest) is a very hands-on person and I could see him as a farmer and possibly taking over our farm if our dad were still alive. But because of what has happened he chose a different career.

I know my career interests have definitely been affected. I love agriculture and I probably would have ended up in it some how but now I have this purpose to continue through all adversity. I also feel the need to explain to people the importance of farming because otherwise it seems like my dad died for no reason. He died not only doing something that he loved, but doing something that would benefit other people. I think that is an important thing for people to know. Farming is more than a job, it is a way of life and it is vital to our survival.

Continued on next page

READERS WRITE

Raw Milk Revisited

Editor's note: *We received lots of comments about Fay Benson's article "Thinking About Selling Raw Milk?" in the Winter 2006 issue of SFQ. We'll let Fay have the last word first:*

I received many responses to the article and although it was nice to hear comments of support, I learned the most from the comments of Dr. Kathryn Boor with the Food Science Department at Cornell. Professor Boor grew up on a dairy farm in NY, so was familiar with drinking raw milk. She commented on the recent out break of E. coli sickness in the state of Washington where raw milk sickened at least 18 people with E. coli O157:H7. Two children nearly died. Milk and environmental swabs taken from the milking area of the farm in question tested positive for E. coli O157:H7 -- the same strain found in the human illness case samples.

Parents of the children who will now need to have dialysis treatment for the rest of their lives are suing the farm owners. This is an unfortunate event and definitely not the norm. It is important to note that the FDA and the National Academies of Science recommend avoiding consumption of raw milk as both agencies have determined that the risks are greater than any possible benefits. We, and our customers, need to weigh the risks carefully. Are we risking just a painful stomach bug or are we risking the life long health of our children?

Fay Benson
Cornell Cooperative Extension of Cortland County

Joanna,

SFQ is sure a welcome addition to our Country Folks subscription. We just got the Winter issue and I think it's the best one yet. I can get through most newspapers in a single meal. But with so many interesting articles, each *Small Farm Quarterly* definitely lasts for several meals! I thought the raw milk article was excellent. It provided useful information where there is a gap. It didn't necessarily provide "the other side" but that side is always presented. Point-Counter point is not always necessary… Kudos for pushing the envelope.

Michael Glos
Kingbird Farm, Berkshire, NY

Hello Fay,

Wanted to let you know that the Raw Milk article was great! This is the kind of info that small farms need to receive and to be encouraged to try. It would be great for the farmer to have added income and also great for the consumer to get "really good milk," not milk that has been taken apart and put back together.

Pat Kane
Shamrock Hill Farm, Port Crane, NY

Dear Fay,

I read with great interest your article on raw milk in the recent *Small Farm Quarterly* publication. I am currently with the University of KY (Department of Animal and Food Sciences) but actually my interest in the article comes from a personal perspective. I grew up on one of the last dairy farms in Suffolk County, Long Island. We had tried to sell raw milk many years ago but without going into a long story at this point, it was something we wanted to do, but were prevented.

The article gives me hope that small scale dairying and direct consumer sales have a future in NY (and LI). Since our farm was recently preserved through the sale of development rights, re-starting a dairy operation is something I am investigating for myself… Thanks for taking the time to write an informative story.

Herb Strobel
University of Kentucky Department of Animal and Food Sciences

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Finally, from Steve Smith, one of the farmers featured in Fay's article:

Howdy Fay,

Found out your article appeared in the *Small Farm Quarterly* this past Saturday as we were loading a cow into the trailer and it was starting to snow and this couple pulled up on the road and asked if this was the farm that had been described in the Quarterly. We showed them around and the man asked if we knew anyone that had had their lactose intolerance cured by drinking raw milk. We know folks whose stomach problems disappeared with raw milk but have no firsthand knowledge of lactose intolerance. The couple has a bred heifer so they will discover for themselves if raw milk helps. Then today, a Delhi farmer called and talked to Barb at length about starting an organic dairy and selling some raw milk. He had moved here from PA and been told by everyone that raw milk could not be sold in NY. Your article opened his eyes.

While in Wisconsin we visited a raw milk dairy selling roughly 500 gals at $4.50/gal a week on a cow share program to folks from Madison, Rockford, Chicago and Milwaukee. They have 29 cows and a bull in the barn this winter. The customers come weekly and on the same day each week so the dairy persons can manage the supply. To work with the State they have put in 2 bulk tanks. The customers own the part of the herd that supplies their milk, and the farmers lease the cows back from them. The milk from the rest of the herd is put in the other tank and picked up by Organic Valley. If you do the math you can see why they are looking at cheese making for utilizing the surplus milk.

Steve Smith
Meadowsweet Farm, Lodi, NY

About SFQ readers

In last fall's issue of Small Farm Quarterly we sent out Reader Feedback cards to certain areas of our circulation. Many thanks to the more than 500 readers who returned cards.

According to responses:

- 57% of SFQ readers are members of their local Cooperative Extension Association
- 57% grow field crops or forages
- 45% are involved in dairy
- 41% raise beef
- 41% have woodlot, forestry, or maple
- 22% raise sheep or goats
- 24% raise poultry
- 19% do some direct marketing
- 13% practice organic agriculture
- 11% are involved in horticulture
- 5% have a greenhouse or high tunnel
- 3% do processing
- 4 % do not farm

MARKETING

Lessons from North Carolina Sunshine Lavender Farm

By Bernadette Logozar

This month I'd like to feature the last of the three farms I visited when I was in North Carolina last October. Sunshine Lavender Farm, in Hurdle Mill, is the only lavender farm in North Carolina. This farm is owned and managed by Annie Baggett and her family.

Annie Baggett comes to farming from the world of marketing and advertising, so she has an edge over most farmers when it comes to promoting her products and her farm. There are tips from Annie that I think would be useful for any farmer who is branching out and seeking to connect directly with their customers.

Prior to moving to the farm, Annie had a dream that her front field was full of purple blooms. That dream is now a reality where Annie, her husband Dale and daughters Abigail and Sylvie have lived and tended the farm for five years.

On land formerly cultivated by neighboring Latta Dairy Farm, over 17 varieties of lavender now grow and bloom in that field of dreams. With support from family, friends and the local community, Sunshine Lavender Farm and its line of natural products for body, gifts, and weddings continue to grow and flourish. Sunshine Lavender Farm uses organic practices and innovation to ensure the survival of lavender in the North Carolina climate.

SAVVY MARKETING

Before starting her farm, Annie Baggett carefully planned her marketing strategy. She knew where she would be marketing her products, how she would connect with her customers, the details of the packaging and promotion. For example, Annie uses the color lavender to help her 'stand out' in the crowd. "When we go to the farmers' markets we have a lavender pop-up. We are the ONLY purple tent in the sea of white and blues. So we are easy to spot," Annie told the group.

The biggest investment she made was for a well-designed and eye-appealing sign to take with her to markets and craft shows. "It has been worth every penny," comments Annie. Of course, with her background in marketing and promotion, Annie not only has the expertise herself, she also has connections to resources most small farms don't have.

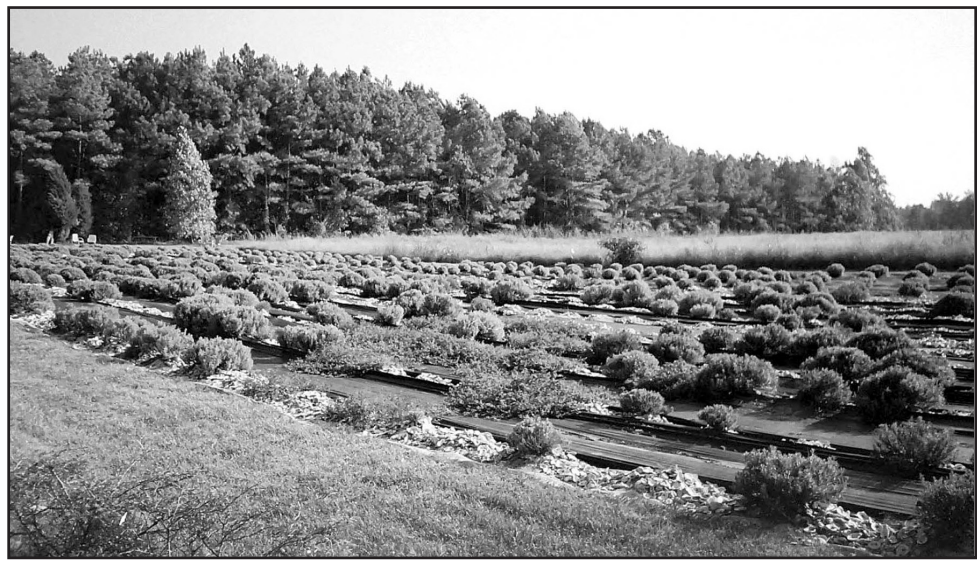
Sunshine Lavender Farm has logo that is clean, simple and easily transferable. And their website is up and running www.sunshinelavender.com. A quick visit will give you a definite sense of how Annie uses lavender (both the color and the herb) to promote her farm.

CONNECTING WITH CUSTOMERS

This is critical for any business—your customer base. Annie has a number of ways that she connects with her customers. She produces a regular email newsletter that keeps her customers updated about happenings on the farm, events that Sunshine Lavender Farm will be attending, and product availability.

In addition to direct sales at area farmers' markets, Annie sells wholesale to a number of retail stores. She has carefully solicited these outlets and she does not undercut their prices. Rather she encourages customers from those communities to purchase her products from the local retail distributor. This ensures a local connection for the customer as well as providing a purchase at those locations.

Sunshine Lavender Farm participates in local events and is not open to the public other than once a year. In June, they hold a by-invitation-only Lavender Harvest Celebration, just before the lavender is harvested, as a customer appreciation event. Only those who are on Annie's e-newsletter list are included in the invitation. This event brings some 5000 customers to the farm in one weekend!



Lavender Fields grace the hillside in front of Annie Baggett's house. Annie mulches the lavender plants with shells to help retain moisture and reflect the North Carolina sun.
Photographer: Bernadette Logozar

Annie also invites area artists to come to the farm and be inspired. The creations that come out of these art retreats can be found on Sunshine Lavender Farm website and are definitely worth a look.

LESSONS TO TAKE HOME

One lesson that can be taken from Sunshine Lavender Farm is to take the time to know your product features well, and use these features to help promote your product and reach your customers.

Second, if you have product that is very unique and new to your area, a lot of your time will be spent on educating your customers about the features of your product and how they can use this in their lives. Educating your customer should be part of your marketing plan; use this to your advantage. Each time you provide information on your product and your farm you are connecting with a potential customer. This is an opportunity to show how to use, integrate or combine what you are selling into your customers' life.

Before visiting Sunshine Lavender Farm I didn't even think that lavender could be used in cookies, ice tea or lemonade. Although I knew lavender was a member of the rosemary family, I didn't make the connection to culinary uses since for me lavender has such a strong connection to health and beauty uses. So I can admit I learned something new on my visit to Sunshine Lavender Farm.

Third, if you are selling both retail and wholesale, don't try and do both in the same community. Let your distributors work for you in some locations. This will free up more of your time as well as strengthen your relationship with your wholesale distributors. In the end, it will pay off for you, your wholesale account and your retail consumer.

Finally, remember to keep revisiting your overall goal for your family, farm and business, so you can stay true to what you hope to achieve and the lifestyle you want for yourself, your family and your community. Remember it's ok to dream. After all, look where Annie Baggett's dream has brought her in a few short years.

Bernadette Logozar is Rural and Ag Economic Development Specialist with Cornell Cooperative Extension of Franklin County. She can be reached at 518-483-7403 or bel7@cornell.edu.

Rural Kids

Continued from prev. page

Q. This is such a powerful story Michelle, but I imagine it might be hard to share. Do you talk with others about what happened?

A. When I tell people about my dad, I'm a little apprehensive. I know I said that this is a big reason for what I am doing in my future career and how I feel about agriculture, but when I tell people what happened they always look a little guilty or sad for asking. Yes, my dad died. Yes, I miss him and sometimes wish it didn't happen and he was still here. But it did, and I am who I am because of it.

Part of being a part of a farming or rural community is that you are never left alone. So even though I lost my real dad, I gained so many dads that I can't even count. So I guess what I tell people is this: Because of what my dad did in the community and who he was as a person, our family has been able to recover and continue his legacy in our own ways.

Q. How did this shape your approach to farm safety and policy?

A. This accident could have been prevented. There is a roll bar on back of each tractor but because it didn't fit down the row of trees my dad took it off. If the roll bar were in place there is a possibility he could have survived. Because of this fact I believe that no matter what your skill level or experience is with the equipment you should take every possible precaution to be safe.

Your actions affect more people than just you. Next time you are about to hop on a tractor think about what your family would do if something happened to you.

Q. What special farm safety learning opportunities did you take part in while growing up?

A. I personally wasn't around any equipment when I was growing up. About two years after my dad died my mom sold the farms that we owned because we couldn't find someone to manage them. I have learned some farm safety through FFA, but mostly related to animals. I am more cautious about driving, especially down my driveway, which is lined by orchards. Also, when I went to my grandpa's shed or the packinghouse I watched, and I kind of just picked up what to do and not do around equipment.

Q. If you were to give other rural families one helping of advice, what would it be?

A. Your actions affect more people than just you. Next time you are about to hop on a tractor or are around equipment think about what your family would do if something happened to you. As much as we like to think it, we are not invincible. And because of that fact we need to think about the possible consequences of not taking that extra effort to be a little safer.

Many thanks, Michelle, for agreeing to be a part of this column. Your story is sad, but your outlook and message are so inspiring. May all of us take the time to slow down and consider the ramifications of our actions – especially on our loved ones.

A FEW FINAL THOUGHTS:

- Most accidents do not just happen; they are the result of an error in judgment. Because the ability to perceive danger and react safely is a learned behavior, children need regular and consistent training and appropriate examples to follow.
- Although formal safety training is excellent, leading by example may, according to research, be even more persuasive.
- Educate children, friends and co-workers about safety precautions -- never assume that others understand safety rules.
- Information about tractor certification courses scheduled in NYS can be found at: http://nys4h.cce.cornell.edu/program/program.php.

If you would like to nominate a friend (or yourself!) for an interview in this column contact me, Celeste Carmichael, State 4-H Program Specialist, at: 607-255-4799 or cjc17@cornell.edu. Any topic related to rural youth will be considered.

Resource Spotlight

Rural Youth Resources

Want to know more about farm safety or rural youth? Here are a couple of websites to get you started:

Safer Farm Environments for Children, from Cornell's Ag Health and Safety Program: www.diaglab.vet.cornell.edu/aghealth/publics/SAFER FARM ENVIRNMENTS.pdf.

USDA Rural Information Center site about rural youth: www.nal.usda.gov/ric/ricpubs/youth.html

Issues Facing Rural Youth: A Compendium of Research, Reports, and Public Opinion Polls. www.national4-hheadquarters.gov/library/ruralresearch.pdf.

COWS AND CROPS

Dealing With High Fertilizer Prices

By Mike Hunter

Spring planting is just around the corner and farmers have been busily preparing for the upcoming growing season, getting farm equipment ready for spring's work and ordering the seeds that they plan on growing. This is also the time of year they are planning on what herbicides and fertilizers to use on the farm. They're busy getting crop input prices, talking with their fertilizer dealers and placing early orders.

Farmers that have talked to their fertilizer suppliers have already found out and those that haven't will notice a significant increase in fertilizer prices. The biggest increase has been in nitrogen fertilizers. Skyrocketing natural gas prices have driven nitrogen fertilizer prices higher than last year's prices. Farmers should expect to pay more for their nitrogen fertilizer this season. We can't blame our local suppliers for high fertilizer prices; it is not their fault. Local fertilizer suppliers may absorb some of the increased costs and make less money on each ton of nitrogen fertilizer. Higher natural gas prices are to blame for these drastic increases.

How does rising gas prices affect nitrogen fertilizer prices? Natural gas is the primary feedstock in the production of most commercial nitrogen fertilizers. Natural gas accounts for about 85% of the cost to make anhydrous ammonia. Anhydrous ammonia is used to produce other nitrogen containing fertilizers such as urea, ammonium nitrate, urea-ammonium nitrate, diammonium phosphate (DAP) and monoammonium phosphate (MAP). With the exception of ammonium nitrate, all the fertilizers listed are commonly used on our local farms in Jefferson County, NY.

The real question is, "How do we deal with higher fertilizer prices?" For the dairy farmer it means accounting for as much nitrogen that is already on the farm as possible. You should take full advantage of cow manure's potential to supply the nutrients to the crops. Don't forget to consider all of the nitrogen that is produced from a plowed down hayfield. You should also be using the pre sidedress nitrate test to determine if additional nitrogen is needed for your corn crop.

Manure has the potential to supply many of the nutrients needed to grow a good crop of corn. Nutrient values in manure can vary between farms and even on the same farm, especially when handling, feeding or bedding changes occur. It is recommended that you have dairy manure analyzed for nutrients. It is worth the money to sample and send their dairy manure to a lab to get an idea of the fertilizer value that it contains. If you don't have it tested you'll need to use "book" or average values for manure.

Not all of the nitrogen in manure is made available to the crop. Manure will supply both organic and inorganic forms of nitrogen. The organic N is slowly made available to the crop. About 35% of the organic N is available to the crop the first year. For example, if you were to apply 15 tons of "average" manure per acre it will supply about 100 total pounds of organic N. Assuming only 35% of this is available to the plants the first year, the 15 tons of manure will supply 35 pounds of organic N to the crop. Manure applications from previous years should also be accounted for. There is residual organic N left in the soil from previous manure applications.

Sidedressing nitrogen fertilizer on corn crop in Adams, New York.

Liquid manure being applied to orchardgrass at Doubledale Farms in Ellisburg, NY.

The inorganic nitrogen in manure is in the form of ammonium nitrogen and functions much like the commercial fertilizer sources farmers buy. If you don't capture it the first crop year, the inorganic N will disappear into thin air. Incorporating manure or injecting it into the soil is the best way to capture the ammonium N. If incorporation of manure is delayed 15 days you may have lost nearly all of the ammonium N supplied by the manure. Using the previous manure application example, a 15 ton per acre manure rate will give you 60 lbs of ammonium N. If that manure application were incorporated immediately you could save nearly 65% of the ammonium N for the crop.

You should not overlook any nitrogen credits that you get from plowed down hayfields. The amount of organic N supplied by the plowed down sod depends on the amount of legume in the stand. The more alfalfa or clover in the stand the more nitrogen supplied. The organic N from sods is available much like the organic N in manure. The rule of thumb has always been that 55% of the N is available the 1st year. Let's say that the plowed down grass hayfield supplies 100 lbs of organic N per acre. The first year there will be 55 pounds nitrogen available to the crop that will be planted in that same field.

A pre sidedress nitrate test (PSNT) is a useful diagnostic tool used to determine whether there is enough nitrogen in the soil to carry the corn crop through the season. PSNT's are only useful if organic material such as manure or plowed down sod was used in the field. A soil sample is taken when the corn is between 6 and 12 inches tall. The sample is dried and tested. The test will determine the nitrate content of the soil. If there is an adequate amount of nitrate in the soil, then sidedressing or applying additional nitrogen fertilizer is not recommended. If the soil has a low nitrate reading, you should consider sidedressing the corn crop.

Maximizing your manure usage and taking a close look at all nitrogen credits can reduce your nitrogen fertilizer bill. These are things that we should be looking at every year. Sometimes it takes high fertilizer prices to remind us to look at things we can be doing better on our farms. For more information on PSNT's contact the Cornell Cooperative Extension, your crop consultant, or your local crop supplier.

Mike Hunter is Agronomy and Field Crops Educator and Agriculture Program Leader with Cornell Cooperative Extension of Jefferson County. This article is updated from one originally published in Jefferson County's Extension Connection newsletter, May-June 2003.

HOME AND FAMILY

Not all Returns on Investment are $$$$

By David Hoover and Bill Henning

On January 26 and 27, some New Yorkers attended the annual North Central Ohio Dairy Grazing Conference in Wooster, Ohio. This two-day conference, the largest of its kind in the US, drew 375 participants from across the east. It turned out to be a very rewarding trip. There was, as usual, a lot of technical information shared by farmers and university people. But what folks found most striking was one panel discussion by a group of farmers. In this little article we will attempt to relay the essence of that discussion.

The panel discussion centered on the decision making process on small grazing farms. None of the farms was larger than 130 acres. No farm milked more than 45 cows. The farms had been in operation for between 15 and 30 years.

The questioning began with: Why do you farm the way you do?

All four panelists told us they prefer a lifestyle that involves the whole family working together. And, the importance of working together is its benefits for the children.

Q: What is the primary concern in your decision making process?

While money is an important consideration it is secondary to factors that might affect the family-friendly lifestyle.

Q: Who is involved in the decision making process?

One farmer said they hold a regular family conference and anyone in the family from school age and older can contribute to decision-making. Another farmer only involves children in decisions that directly affect them. Another said that involving the family in decision-making had not created any conflicts.

Q: How do you decide what new technologies to adopt?

One farmer explained why he kept his new parlor to six swing units even though he has room for eight. He does not want to milk too fast because this is valuable time spent with his children. He knows more about what their lives are all about. The children look forward to milking. They are all closer and happier.

Another said that if a new technology might detract from the enjoyment of farming it is not adopted. For similar reasons, yet another farmer will not use automatic takeoffs. One of the panelists prefers to put up loose hay because he likes doing it and the whole family participates in a group setting. They all agreed the children need these responsibilities.

In related comments, one couple agreed the boys should do a little more house work

Continued on next page

GRAZING

Keep It Simple

Avoiding unnecessary costs can make your small grazing dairy more profitable

By Dave Forgey

Editor's note: *Dave Forgey is well known to graziers across the US. We greatly appreciate his contribution of this article to SFQ.*

Keep It Simple. This is a concept that works very well with rotational grazing. In fact some graziers call it the KISS (keep it simple stupid) system. It all involves doing things which don't cost much money or take much time but which increase your net returns.

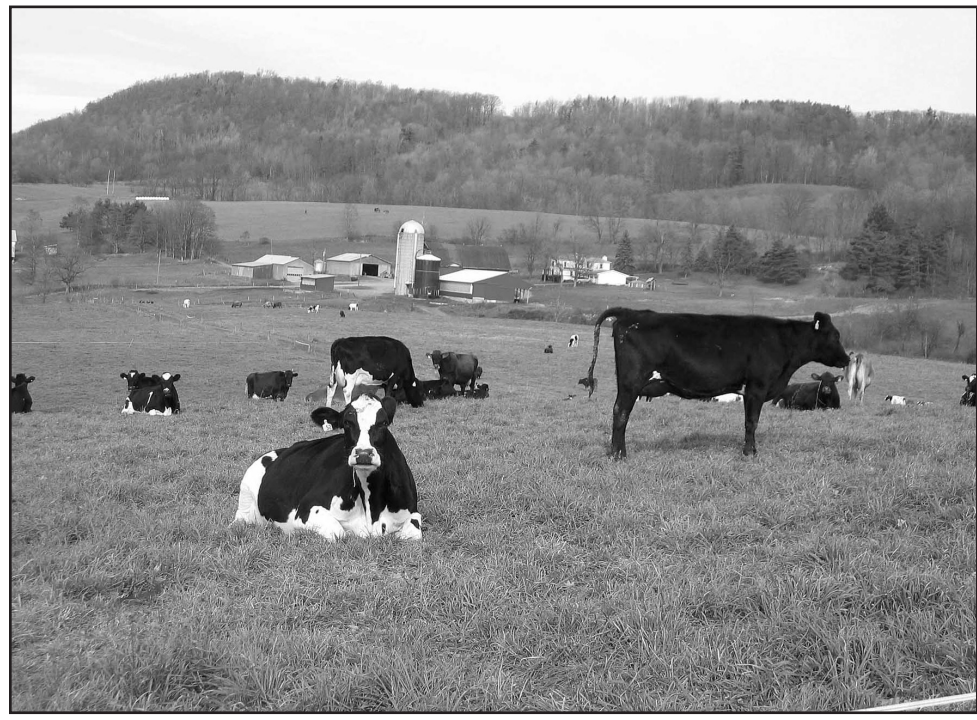
This has been one of my greatest challenges. I have always been a gadget person. I would always go for any idea which would cut the time or labor involved and I always fell for the sales pitch that all these gadgets increased my profit by reducing labor or expense. In fact over the years I've probably bought enough gadgets to reduce my labor and expense by over 200%, but my expense just went up and I was still working as hard as ever.

I think most of us fall into the same trap and we just have to do more to pay for the labor saving devices. Even after changing to our low cost system I have to watch myself or I spend money for things I don't need. The first fencing salesman I talked to told me I needed a reel to roll up poly-wire on at $40. I bought one. Since then I have been buying extension cord reels at the local hardware for less than $5. Even my first fences had more wires than were needed. I've found that after proper training, one wire interior and two wire perimeter fences do quite well for controlling most cattle.

The same goes for the plants we grow for pasture. Many times you can pay four or five times as much for extravagant seeds which don't produce any more feed than a simple orchard grass-clover pasture. Don't get me wrong, an additional seed expense of $15 to $20 dollars per acre can easily be recovered if the dry matter yield only increases by a few hundred pounds per year. But many times this doesn't happen unless we change our management or fertility system, and this increases our cost of production.

If we're going to be early adopters of these grazing ideas we have to do the research to document our cost savings on each change. Otherwise we only know at the end of the year if we have more income, but we don't know where it came from. Sooner or later the research facilities will catch up with us and start doing economic analysis on many of these grazing ideas. Then we can use their research to fine tune our operations.

It's a good idea to walk all your paddocks every 10 days, so you keep track of what is growing. If you think of a scale from 1-10, with 1 being bare ground, and 10 being grass 10" tall, you can begin to keep track of the amount of grass that is on your farm. You need to keep the grass in the vegetative stage so don't let any grass head out. Try to pasture when the grass is 6"-8" tall.



Good grazing management may save you more money than the latest gadget. Photographer: Fay Benson

If you get too many paddocks at that height all at once it's time to make some hay on a few of them to keep them in the right stage of growth for the next round. Remember the grass will slow down as moisture gets short, or heat units build up. If you're saying, "hey this is getting complicated," remember it's only brain power, and not costly horsepower you're using.

Since you're walking your paddocks every 10 days and keeping a log of the amount of grass in each, you should have a lot of numbers from 1-10. Average the number in each paddock at the end of each walk to see what the average number is for the whole farm. Is it higher or lower than the last walk? If it's getting high make more hay, if it's getting low, slow down your rotation and feed a little hay out in the paddock. Scatter the bales along the fence or under a breakwire so they don't make a mess of it.

If it sounds like a lot of walking, it is, but you're always close to the livestock so you can be observing cow behavior, or checking heats, and becoming a good stockman.

This past winter I heard a University economist talk about his prediction for the future of the dairy business in this country. He felt that a confinement dairy to be economically viable needed to milk between 500 and 1000 cows. They would need 60% equity going into the operation. Then they would hire labor for $6-$8 per hour and at the end of the year net $300 per cow. If you don't compare that to anything it sounds like a good annual profit, but I have talked to many graziers who keep it simple who are netting nearly $1000 per cow on moderate sized farms without the hassle of managing large numbers of employees or cows.

It's a well known fact that our prices for milk, meat or grain haven't risen much in the last ten years, but services and equipment we purchase to raise these products have gone up dramatically. Getting bigger and thus more efficient only goes so far in spreading the costs over more units of production and we usually have to work harder to earn the same or less return.

If that mega-dairy is the future dairy industry then there is little chance for the young people of this country to ever be anything but an employee on such an operation. I don't believe this is the only option for young people. I believe with the right opportunity a young person who can open their mind to the new concepts behind rotational grazing and seasonal dairying could be operating on their own within 5 to 10 years after starting in this system. Just keep it simple.

Dave & Helen Forgey are partners in River View Farm, Inc, of Logansport, IN. Dave has grazed for many years, written many articles, and has spoke on numerous occasions here in New York. His web site is www.forgraze.com.

Investment

Continued from prev. page

and the girls should do a little more farm work. It was also mentioned that as farms became more technical, children seem more likely to leave the farm. The organic movement was deemed as one of the lights at the end of the tunnel, and when farms turn organic children are more likely to keep farming.

Q: Why don't you milk more cows?

The first response was "Why add more cows?" Another said he'd keep more heifers to help his sons start their own farms. It was suggested that a farm should not milk more cows than it can feed, and that increasing herd size is not a family-friendly experience.

Diversification was also mentioned as a means of expanding income. Vegetable production was immediately mentioned. One farmer operates a wood shop while another is even raising camels.

Takeaway message: There can be a lot more to farming than making money. These four panelists exploited their own imaginations in the pursuit of the better life – for themselves and their families.

Bill Henning and his wife Kathleen operate a grass-based beef and sheep farm in the Finger Lakes region of New York. He is also the Small Farms Specialist with PRO-DAIRY/CCE-NWNY Dairy, Livestock, and Field Crops Team. David Hoover farms with his family in Yates County, NY.

MANAGING RISK

For CSA, Managing Risks is Just Good Business

At Native Offerings Farm, committed customers share risks and reap benefits.

By Joan Sinclair Petzen

Editor's note: *This article is part of a series focusing on risk management funded by the New York Crop Insurance Education Program under the Risk Management Agency (USDA) and the NYS Department of Agriculture & Markets.*

Stewart & Deb Ritchie started Native Offerings Farm with an eye toward minimizing risks right from the beginning. By "bootstrapping," as they call it, they were able to get into the business with limited capital and financial risk. And to minimize both financial and market risks, the couple used the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model. They sell "shares" to customers before the season even begins, and then deliver fresh produce to them weekly during (and even after) the growing season.

The Ritchies run their farm pro-actively, making decisions that reduce risks and increase their chances of success with a clearly articulated goal in mind: "We strive for super high-quality produce and to connect people with seasonal eating based on the local climate."

After managing a 7-acre vegetable operation on the Arden Farm in East Aurora, NY for a year, the Ritchies decided to rent the farm. The farm had a long history of providing vegetables to the community through a self-service farm stand and sales at a weekly farmers market. Those marketing ties provided a strong platform for the Ritchies to launch their CSA business in 1997.

They printed informational brochures and used the Arden Farm customer list to recruit 60 to 70 members their first season. The up-front payment by CSA members for a season's worth of produce allowed the Ritchies to finance their first crop without the risk of borrowing for operating expenses. The second risk-reducing advantage of the CSA approach is that the Ritchie's crop is marketed before it's planted.

The Arden Farm had a great location for selling, but it was not ideal for growing. The limited acreage was dominated by heavy clay soils with a hard pan. The Ritchies tried to improve the soil and reduce the crusting that hindered crop emergence by switching from the previous owner's rotary tillage to deep-chiseling, and leaving rough seedbeds with plenty of litter and compost. But as their business began to grow, the farm's shortcomings became more apparent. So Stew and Deb began to search for a farm of their own.

The couple wanted to stay close to their established East Aurora market, but they knew that one way to reduce production risks was to find a farm with soils that were better suited for vegetable production. So they mapped out all of the areas in Erie County with sandy loam soils, and began and began their search. Five years later, they settled on a 180-acre farm near Scotts Corners in neighboring Cattaraugus County. It met their soil criteria and was still a reasonable drive from their established markets.

MANY MEMBER OPTIONS

Even before the move, the Ritchies focused their attention on improving their marketing and meeting their members' needs. Sometimes potential CSA customers don't join because they don't want produce through the entire season. To reduce this potential marketing risk, the Ritchies offer several options to their membership.

Regular summer shares start in June and run for 22 weeks through October. Early in the season, deliveries consist mostly of a wide variety of greens, with warmer-season crops added as they ripen. But for their members who aren't wild about greens the Ritchies offer a July-start share.

The Ritchies also offer an 18-delivery winter share that runs from November through March. It typically includes root crops, potatoes, apples, onions, garlic, and winter squash, as well as greenhouse-grown greens when available, such as kale, collards, mustard, cabbage, and brussels spouts. The Ritchies also make kimchi, sauerkraut and other fermented vegetables for the winter share.

Eighty percent of the CSA members purchase a 20-week fruit share that is assembled with tree-ripened fruit and berries from several local farms. The season starts in June with strawberries. Members enjoy berries, cherries, peaches, plums and nectarines through summer and wind up with apples and pears in fall.

Eye appeal is important with fruit crops. The Ritchies learned that many of their customers prefer clearly labeled low-spray to organic fruit if blemishes are an issue. By cooperating with specific regional fruit growers, Native Offerings Farm is able to capture more of the market with the sale of a fruit share.

To reduce weather risks and extend the season at both ends, Stew and Deb Ritchie grow their tomatoes planted directly in the soil of their earth-floored greenhouse. Photo by Desiree' Ottley

What you can learn from the Ritchies

Here are a dozen ways the Ritchies reduce risks on their CSA farm:

1. Match crops to your farm's climate and resources.
2. Use members' up front share payments to cover operating expenses.
3. Offer members share options that meet their needs.
4. Remember: Stable income helps when securing loans.
5. Avoid equipment investments when you can hire neighbors.
6. Choose diverse varieties that are insect- and disease- resistant…
7. …and that your customers like to eat.
8. Cooperate with other farmers so each can focus on what they do best.
9. Find alternative markets to sell surplus crops.
10. Consider migrant workers to help with labor crunch.
11. Integrate livestock to increase marketing and rotation options.
12. Strive for year-round sales.

Some CSA customers fret that they get more produce than they could possibly use. So the Ritchies offer both small shares (ideal for two to four people) and large shares (that provide enough produce for a family of four to six). Customers can learn more about the farm's products and practices by visiting the web site at: www.native-offerings.com.

STEADY SALES SECURE LOAN

Stew and Deb use organic production methods, but they are not certified through the USDA's organic certification program. Instead, they've chosen to certify their crops through Certified Naturally Grown™, a non-profit alternative eco-labeling program. The program focuses primarily on certifying local direct marketers and requires far less recordkeeping than USDA. The Ritchies feel that it's a more practical alternative for a highly diversified operation like theirs that relies almost exclusively on building trust with customers through face-to-face interactions. (See: www.naturally-grown.org.)

Reducing financial risks has driven many of the decisions that Stew and Deb have made in their farming career. Using the CSA model has helped them to finish each year within a few hundred dollars of their budget. Strong cash flow from CSA sales enabled them to borrow the capital they needed to purchase the farm.

This was particularly important in their first year at the new farm. They knew from their budgets that they needed to double their income in the first year following their move in order to afford the mortgage payments, which they have since privatized at a fixed interest rate. To limit machinery and equipment investment, the Ritchies hire a neighbor to moldboard plow and make hay.

DIVERSE CROPS REDUCE RISKS

One way the Ritchies reduce production risks from insects, disease and weather is by planting 240 different vegetable varieties. They choose their varieties for insect and disease resistance, as well as for yield, culinary appeal and appearance. As a hedge against production risks, the

COWS AND CROPS

Composting Bedded Pack Barns Get Attention

By Frans Vokey

Hoard's Dairyman recently ran an article entitled, "They're Sold on Composting Bedded Pack Barns," which caught the attention of many local producers here in Lewis County, NY. Since then I have received a number of questions from people considering this type of housing for their dairy herd. While I continue to educate myself on the potential merits and drawbacks of this type of housing, the following are some thoughts to consider.

BACKGROUND

Composting Bedded Pack (CBP) barns – several of which are found in Minnesota – are described in a series of papers by the University of Minnesota. They are considered to be "an economically feasible alternative type of dairy housing facility for producers wanting to upgrade or modernize their milking herd facilities."

The basic layout includes a clay-based loose-housing area bedded with dry sawdust and a concrete feed alley which is separated from the pack by a 4-ft high concrete wall. The three concrete walls surrounding the pack are also 4-ft high to contain the pack as it gets higher. Not unlike any dairy housing system, excellent management and a commitment to maintaining a dry, well-ventilated environment are essential to the success of a CBP barn.

Management: Key word is "Composting"

CBP's differ from traditional bedded packs - they must be actively composting. Composting is a biological process in which oxygen-loving microorganisms break down organic matter into a soil-like material. The microbes need a carbon (contained in the bedding) to nitrogen (contained in the manure) ratio of 30:1 for the composting process to be effective. In the process, heat, water and carbon dioxide are produced.

When a composting system is working properly, temperature of the pack should stay between 120 and 140 degrees F. To manage this process, the pack has to be tilled or stirred twice daily to mix manure and bedding and to keep oxygen in the system. Excellent ventilation is required to keep the surface dry. Managers must also resist the temptation to overcrowd the pack with animals or to skimp on bedding. At least 80 square feet of pack space per cow is needed for Holstein cows.

COMPARISONS TO A THREE-ROW FREE-STALL BARN

The typical dimensions of a CBP barn are similar to that of a 3-row free-stall. Also, according to the Hoard's article, cow comfort in a well-managed CBP might be similar to that of a properly designed and managed sand-bedded free-stall. Therefore producers considering building a CBP barn should use a 3-row, sand-bedded free-stall as a comparison barn.

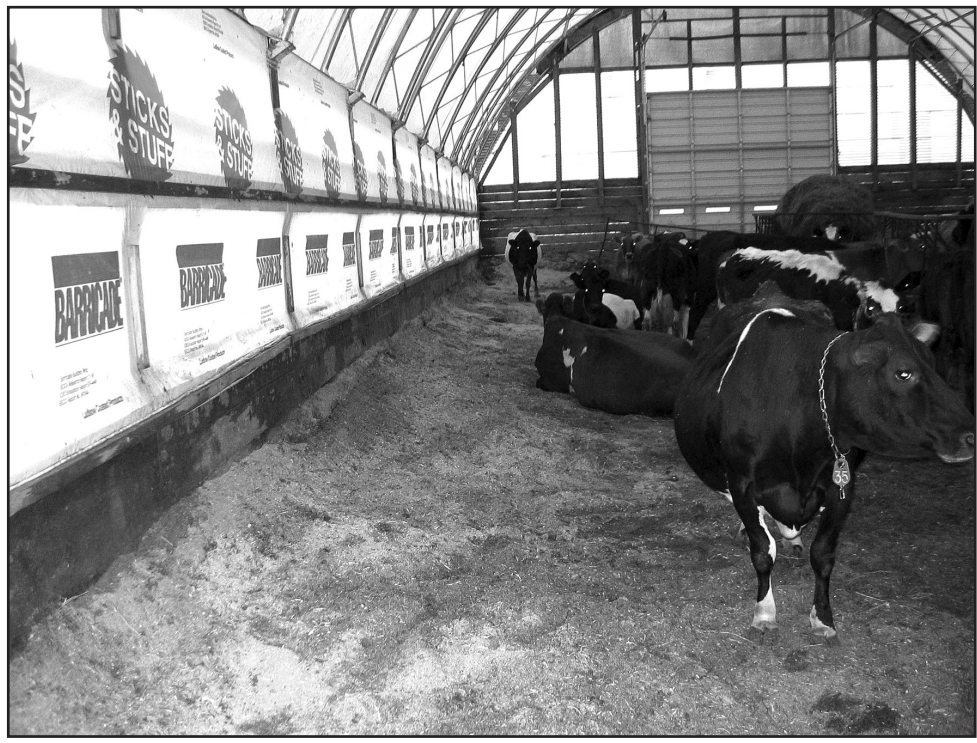
SPACE REQUIREMENTS HIGHER

At first it seems like the CBP barn should be less expensive to build than a 3-row free-stall barn since the pack area can be clay based, lacks stall components and requires less concrete. However, consider a CBP barn designed for 50 cows. At 80 sq ft per cow, the pack area must be 4,000 sq ft. This same area, if converted to three rows of 46-in.-wide free-stalls would allow for 80 stalls, or 88 cows at 110% stocking density.

While there is a cost savings in stalls, keep in mind that the CBP barns have a 4-ft high concrete wall on all sides of the pack. If the barn is used for summer housing, producers suggest a 16-ft sidewall instead of 14 ft to ensure ventilation because the concrete wall blocks airflow. The structural design for a 16-ft high barn requires larger structural members and more bracing than a 14-ft high barn, resulting in an increased initial cost.

BEDDING REQUIREMENTS

According to the information from the Minnesota producers, the cost of good quality sawdust bedding is $750 - $800 per load, which translates into $0.35 to $0.60 per cow per day.



Cows enjoying the comfort of sawdust bedding. Photographer: Fay Benson

Quality sand bedding here in Lewis County, at $7 per ton, translates into $0.10 to $0.16 per cow per day, assuming daily sand use of 40 to 50 lbs. per stall. Use of sand bedding can result in additional cost associated with its removal from the barn, conveyance to storage, land application, and lost crop yields due to increased soil compaction. The price of sawdust has increased in recent years and could be expected to increase further. Increasing fossil fuel prices have resulted in more sawdust and shaving byproducts being used as sources for wood pellets.

LABOR SAVINGS?

One University of Minnesota Extension paper suggests that there should be some labor savings on manure handling. But be careful about budgeting for this. The same paper says that the pack should be tilled or stirred twice daily with an attachment on a skid loader, which takes up to 10 minutes. The feed alley then needs to be scraped as well (presumably after switching skid loader attachments) into a manure storage or directly to a spreader. By comparison, the free-stall would have two alleys to scrape and should not take any more time.

MANURE CONSIDERATIONS

Once manure leaves the barn, the variety of options for handling it makes a comparison difficult. Producers with CBP's say that fall is the best time to remove the pack so that it can be spread on corn ground. Since this might conflict with corn harvest activities, one producer suggests removing the pack daily over several weeks.

It is important that the CBP product be land applied in according with the farm's Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plan (CNMP). The loss of nitrogen during the composting process will result in an even more out-of-balance material, with much higher Phosphorus than Nitrogen. If the CNMP requires manure application on a Phosphorus basis, the same land requirements are needed with the CBP as with free-stall barn manure.

An advantage of the CBP, compared to stored slurry manure, is control of odor during storage and also when it is land applied. While there may still be some stored manure from the scrape alley, it might be possible to apply it to fields where

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CSA

Continued from previous page

Ritchies overplant some crops. And they avoid planting some crops at times when they are vulnerable to infestation, for example Brassicas when they are likely to be attacked by flea beetles. Row covers protect some crops from pests.

The couple sometimes works cooperatively with other CSAs, trading surplus crops for ones they can't grow as well. This allows each farm to reduce risks by growing crops that are best suited to their resources and skills. It's one of the ways the couple tries to build community among growers as well as among their members.

Tomatoes are an important crop for the Ritchies. But the weather at their site makes field-grown tomatoes a risky proposition. To reduce that risk and extend the season at both ends, they now grow their tomatoes planted in the soil of their earth-floored greenhouse. This gives them greater control over growing conditions and insures the consistent, high-quality tomatoes their customers seek.

When Stew drops members' shares at the CSA's three distribution points, he makes each mile count. On those days, he also delivers to wholesale customers or sells at a farmers market. Because the CSA is the couple's core business – accounting for 90 percent of the farm's income – they only sell surplus product through these additional markets. But it helps them turn bumper crops into extra income.

Finding reliable help can be a big challenge on a labor-intensive farm like the Ritchies'. When they first moved to the new farm, no one answered their ads for part- or full-time farm work. But the Ritchie's feel they've all but eliminated the risk of labor shortages since they began hiring migrant workers through a labor contractor. The contractor insures that enough qualified people are available when they are needed.

"Migrant farm workers are professional farmers who see their job on my farm as a career," says Stew. "We have the same guys wanting to come back each year, and that's nice." Native Offerings Farm also trades shares for work. Each of their distribution sites is managed by a working shareholder and a limited number of folks work one day per week on the farm harvesting, sorting, and packing in exchange for their share.

MEAT EXPANDS PRODUCT LINE

The Ritchies recently started selling meat to their members – pork in halves and wholes and beef in quarters and halves. This not only adds another income source, but also helps them make better use of the rest of their farm that they were renting to neighbors.

The new enterprises help spread out their labor, too. Growing more vegetables would have meant focusing on harvest an additional day each week, detracting from the couple's efforts to maintain superior quality. That was a risk the Ritchies were unwilling to take.

The Ritchie's beef cattle graze on intensively rotated pastures. They raise their hogs in deep-bedded pens, and plan to move them onto pasture as well once fences and suitable shelters are completed. The livestock also provide an on-farm source of manure to compost for the vegetable operation.

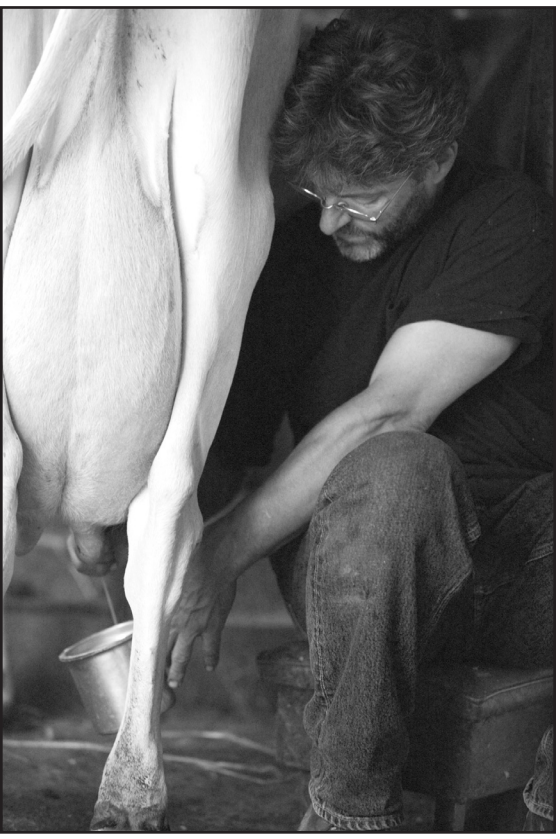
With the addition of the livestock, Natural Offerings' members can get a high percentage of the food they need from the CSA nearly year-round. The livestock also fit right in with the Ritchie's five-year crop rotation. They grow three years of vegetables, followed by a year each of rye and hay. The rye is used mainly as a green manure and mulch, while the hay provides winter feed for the cattle. The rotation also helps maintain soil productivity, and reduce risks from weed, disease, and insect infestations that can plague fields in continuous vegetable production.

Future plans include adding chickens to the mix, first a laying flock and then perhaps broilers down the road. Growth in the livestock enterprises will soon justify hiring a full-time person to manage the animals. This will allow Stew to maintain focus on his role as the general manager. By keeping his eye on the big picture, he can continue to reduce risks by finding synergies that are generated when all of the pieces fit together. The Ritchies have mastered this skill, and it is one of the keys to their successful business.

Joan Sinclair Petzen is an Extension Issue Leader at Cornell Cooperative Extension, Allegany/Cattaraugus Counties.

Emma Houston, Thompson-Finch Farm, Ancram, NY

Elizabeth Keen with newborn Colin in tow, Indian Line Farm, Egremont, MA.



Dominic Palumbo, Moon In The Pond Farm, Sheffield, MA

Sean Stanton, North Plain Farm, Great Barrington, MA

From Field To Plate

Photo Essay by Jason Houston

Six years ago I moved to the Berkshires in Western Massachusetts. The next spring my family joined Indian Line Farm, America's first and longest running CSA, and one of our great local farms. That same summer I began photographing the small farms in my community as a personal project motivated by my love of good, healthy food and a growing sense that what we eat, where it comes from, and how it's grown is one of the most important—and certainly one of the most universally relevant—issues we face today.

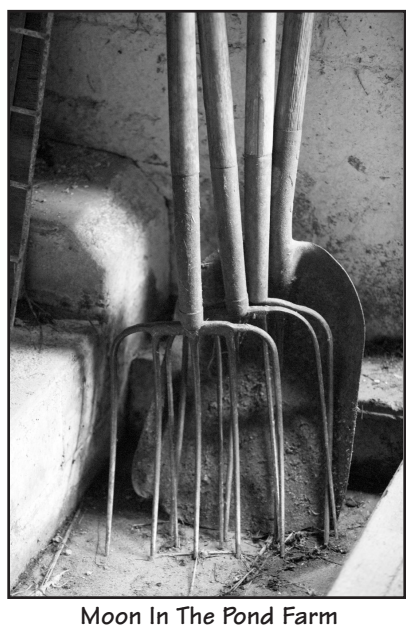
Berkshire County is home to nearly 400 farms and over ten percent of the state's farmland. There is strong support in the restaurants and markets to source food locally, and it is possible, with some effort, to eat an almost completely local menu year round.

My project so far has included over 50 farms, farm stands, and farmers' markets featuring products ranging from flowers to heritage breed animals, raw milk, mushrooms, and, of course, fruits and vegetables. Through editorial work, exhibitions, and public presentations it is my goal to have this work help inspire conversations on the issue of local and sustainable agriculture and to keep those talks intimate, alive, and invigorated.

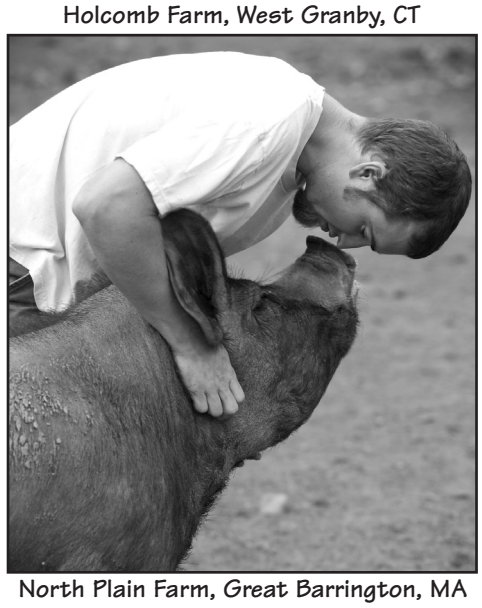
Jason Houston is an independent documentary photographer with over 15 years experience with a wide range of subjects. His most recent project on local and sustainable agriculture has included over 25 feature stories in publications including *The New York Times Magazine*, *TIME*, *Orion Magazine*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *New York Magazine*, *NewFarm.org*, *Organic Gardener*, *Berkshire Living*, and many others. An exhibition of his work will be traveling throughout 2006 including stops at Yale University in April and Spike Gallery in NYC in June/July. For more information please visit www.jasonhouston.com.

Indian Line Farm

Holcomb Farm, West Granby, CT



Moon In The Pond Farm



North Plain Farm, Great Barrington, MA

Chase Farm, Victor, NY

High Lawn Farm, Lenox, MA

MARKETING

Cooperative Farm Stores: Tierra Viva - A Chilean Example

By Elizabeth Henderson

Just before leaving for Chile in early November 2005, I read a message from Duncan Hilchey of Cornell's Community, Food and Agriculture Program, inviting farmers in the Northeast to join his SARE-funded project to explore the potential for cooperative farm stores. Andrea Tuczek, a Chilean organic farmer and organizer of an annual symposium and expo, had invited me to Santiago to give a talk on Community Supported Agriculture. She arranged to meet me at Tierra Viva, which turns out to be a farmer cooperative store. This is an account of what I observed during my all too short trip.

WELCOME TO SANTIAGO

The taxi driver who met me at the airport drove me to meet up with Andrea at Tierra Viva. We went for several miles along Avenue Alameda, Santiago's main drag, past the central bus terminal, the elegant old train station, the University of Santiago. A central strip, a band of trees and grass with a winding bicycle path, divides the 4 lanes of Alameda. From there we turned off into residential streets, rows of attractive single family homes with metal or wooden fences around them that could be locked.

TWENTY FARMS – ONE STORE

Andrea was waiting at Tierra Viva, a cooperative store owned by 20 farms. A solidly built woman with startlingly bright blue eyes and blond hair, Andrea is Chilean-German, an organic farmer and a recent widow. Her husband and farm partner died a year ago, leaving Andrea with three children and a 10-hectare vegetable farm. With the help of four hired workers, Andrea is keeping the farm going.

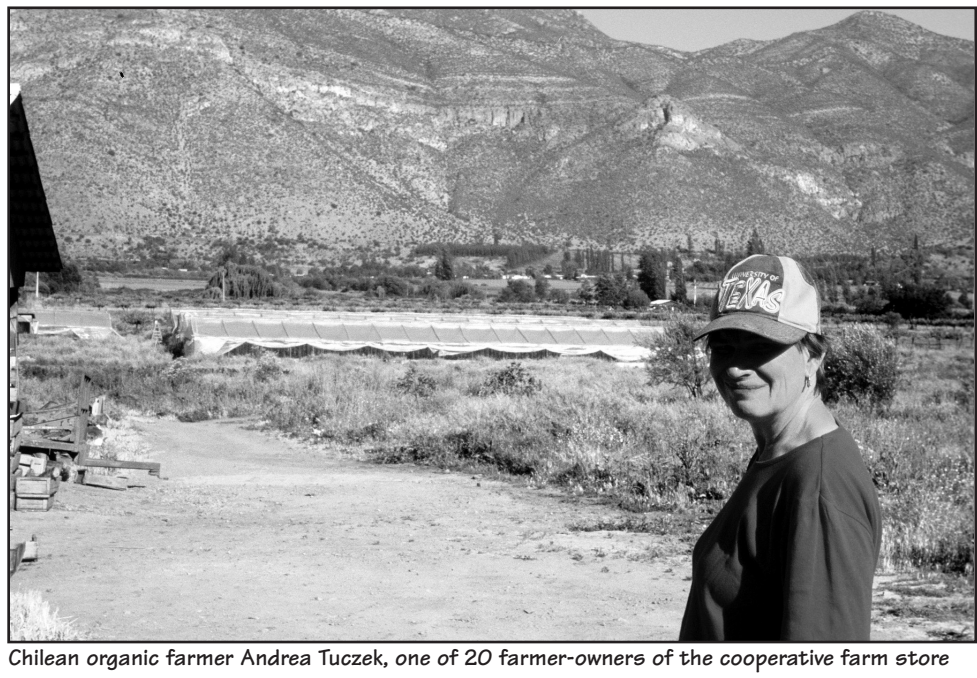
She gave me a tour of the store, a former residence. There are two rooms with benches full of produce along the walls, a room with shelves of value added products - jams, jellies, juices, packaged grains and beans, dried fruit - and a small dining room where patrons were being served lunch. Andrea and her friend Katerina supply most of the produce. Other coop members bring milk and other dairy products, and eggs. There is even a baker who supplies hearty whole wheat breads.

The store kitchen prepares simple luncheons using the farmers' products. Each of the farmers spends a day a week helping to staff the store along with two employees. Besides running her own farm, Andrea does most of the book keeping for Tierra Viva. While it is breaking even financially, the store is not a big enough market for everything Andrea could produce on her farm. She talked of plans to start an organic farmers' market in Santiago. The city of 8 million people has an extensive public market, but no farmers' markets.

ORGANIC STANDARDS IN CHILE

The farmer members have a certification committee that manages their own organic guarantee based on standards of the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements. New farmers must answer a series of questions about their practices and agree to a farm visit by the other farmers. At the store, they get to know one another and their customers.

I asked Andrea if they had ever had a violation of their standards. She said they have had to drop two farms from their group: one because the farmer left and his wife began to use unacceptable wormers on their livestock, and a second farmer because he reduced his organic acreage in favor of more conventional production. Andrea said the group lost confidence in him. The new Chilean national organic law recognizes participatory guarantees like that practiced by the Tierra Viva farmers.



Chilean organic farmer Andrea Tuczek, one of 20 farmer-owners of the cooperative farm store Tierra Viva in Santiago, Chile.

The store sells fresh produce, dairy, grains, beans, value added items – and lunch.

Weighing food for a customer.

THE FARMING LANDSCAPE

After a tasty meal of salad, bread and a mound of millet surrounded by vegetable stew, Andrea drove me the 80 kilometers north to her farm. Along the highway, we saw extensive vineyards, and hillsides covered with new plantings of avocado trees, an ecological disaster in the making, according to Andrea who decries the elimination of all native vegetation.

Across the border in Argentina we could see Aconcagua, at 22,184 feet, the highest peak in South America. Outside of her village looms a huge copper processing plant. A narrow winding road took us through a small village towards a ring of snow-capped mountains. Andrea's farm nestles in the flatlands at the base of the foothills surrounded by magnificent vistas. Her conventional farming neighbors grow grapes, fruit trees and grains.

Andrea's farm is quite diverse with a small orchard, a flock of chickens, strawberries just coming into bloom, greenhouses with tomatoes already ripening, and fifteen or so other vegetable crops. She manages the farm business, handles marketing and deliveries to Tierra Viva, and does a hefty share of the picking and packing. She also processes some of the berries into jams and beverages, and cans and dries tomatoes.

Miguel, her "right and left hand man," drives the tractor and works with the horses. They combine machine and animal traction - the tractor does the heavy plowing and brush hogging, and the horse pulls a blade that makes narrow beds which alternate with furrows for the irrigation water, and a cultivator to fight the weeds.

LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER

Walking around Andrea's farm, I noticed that the garlic plants still had their scapes. At the store, the garlic bulbs on sale were rather small. I asked if she intended to cut the scapes off. She was not aware that removing them would make the plant put its energy into larger bulbs. I explained that you can also sell the scapes as an "oriental delicacy," excellent for making pesto. We tried some out for dinner, blending the scapes with parsley and nuts from Andrea's walnut trees.

The next morning, Andrea drove me back to Santiago to the Organic Symposium at the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) headquarters. Tierra Viva was one of the sponsors. I was one of 8 speakers. Paul Hepperly from Rodale described the institute's long-term comparative study of organic and conventional field crops. There were two Chilean speakers on aspects of biodiversity. Gabriela Soto, from Costa Rica, gave an excellent holistic presentation on soil health. Manuel Amador, also of Costa Rica, presented an analysis of local marketing, and Rene Piamonte gave an introduction to Biodynamics.

ON THE CAMPUS

At lunch, I got into a lively conversation with a group of eight ag students from the Catholic University. After the Symposium, they took me to visit their organic garden on the campus. They have a tiny space in the nursery where the campus lawns and grounds staff start rose bushes and shrubs. Altogether, the students may have a total of 48 square feet, which they have planted in garlic, onions, cilantro, and other herbs. They proudly showed me their little flock of chickens and cages of rabbits. On a campus with extensive lawns and playing fields, you would think a few more square meters could be found for the use of these organic enthusiasts.

The students delivered me to La Isla, just in time for an elegant meal of local and organic foods and wines with the other symposium participants. Our hostess, Irene Acevedo, owns the restaurant as well as an organic farm a few hours drive from Santiago. Irene tries to use as much organic food as she can in her menu. At the fair the next day, she served as the mistress of ceremonies for a series of talks on nutrition and environmental issues. She is clearly an authority on nutrition herself. She told me that her goal for her farm is to create a CSA, the first in Chile.

Developing local markets for organic products is clearly a challenge in Chile. The Tierra Viva group opened a second store in an upscale neighborhood, but closed it after two years because business was so slow. Larger organic farms are concentrating on export markets for high value crops, such as asparagus. The certification program run by Virgina Zenteno focuses on exports. Tierra Viva is economically viable, but just barely. There are many useful lessons in their experience for farmers elsewhere who might think of opening their own stores.

Elizabeth Henderson operates Peacework Farm, an organic vegetable operation in Newark, NY.

MANAGING RISK

Diverse Livestock, Multiple Markets

Stone and Thistle farm grows a sustainable business by not putting all its eggs in one basket.

By Martha Goodsell

Editor's note: *This article is part of a series focusing on risk management funded by the New York Crop Insurance Education Program under the Risk Management Agency (USDA) and the NYS Department of Agriculture & Markets.*

Managing risks is one of the keys to building a sustainable farm business. That's what Tom and Denise Warren are finding on their grass-based, value-added livestock operation in East Meredith, N.Y. They're also finding that having multiple enterprises, as well as diversified products and markets, is a good way to reduce their production and marketing risks.

The couple, along with their children Reily, Katey and Shane, raises cattle, hogs, sheep, goats, chickens and turkeys on their farm nestled in the Catskill Mountains. They sell meadow-raised meat under their Stone and Thistle Farm label, and they also operate Kortright Creek Creamery, which processes and sells milk, artisan cheese and yogurt from their dairy goats.

Sunday afternoon tours and twice-a-year seminars attract more than 1,000 visitors annually to the farm, where they can shop at the Warren's on-farm store for wool and wool products, maple syrup, honey, jams and crafts in addition to their meat, eggs, and dairy products.

HERITAGE HOGS, ITALIAN DOGS

Having a wide range of products increases market reach and overall sales. But the Warrens' extensive diversification efforts reduce their production risks, as well. Should disease or some other trouble hit one group of livestock, the other enterprises can continue producing income.

Predators, such as coyotes, are one of the biggest production risks faced by small-ruminant and poultry producers like the Warrens. In addition to investing in high-quality electric fence, the Warrens protect their sheep and goats with Maremmas – guard dogs that can approach 100 pounds that were originally bred to defend flocks of sheep in Italy. Occasionally these dogs do double-duty guarding poultry. Border collies are used to herd and move the livestock.

Drought is another potentially devastating production risk for grass-based livestock producers. Instead of investing in an expensive irrigation system, the Warrens use low-cost portable fencing to move their animals from field to field on acreage they rent from nearby landowners when moisture is scarce and grass is in short supply.

Keeping the animals moving is actually a good preventive health practice. It helps reduce parasite loads and eliminate the need for routine antibiotics. The Warrens use an accurate identification system and extensive recordkeeping to track the genetics of their livestock to make sure they are well-adapted to grazing with minimal grain feeding.

They raise Tamworth hogs and Scottish Highland cattle, both heritage breeds that produce lean, flavorful meat and thrive on pasture in cool climates. In addition to providing healthful milk and lean meat, the Warrens' goats are also good at ridding pastures of thistles, burdocks, multiflora rose and other weeds and shrubs left behind by the other livestock.

MANY WAYS TO MARKET

As the animals head to market, they are processed several ways. Cattle, hogs, sheep and goats are slaughtered at a local USDA slaughterhouse. The Warrens process the chicken and turkeys on-farm. And the goat milk, cheese and yogurt are processed and bottled on site. Exercising some control over processing has helped reduce the risks of being dependent on a single processor.

The Warrens' goats supply their Kortright Creek Creamery, which processes and sells milk, artisan cheese and yogurt.

The Warrens reduce market risks by selling the numerous Stone and Thistle and Kortright Creek Creamery products through several different market outlets. Locally, they sell at the Oneonta farmer's market. They have worked with local retailers, and their own on-farm store is now open seven days a week, year round. A distributor picks up bottled goat milk destined for the New York City and Boston markets.

The Warrens' solid reputation for quality and reliability has reduced the need for extensive advertising campaigns. They post prices and details about their products and practices on the farm's website (www.stoneandthistlefarm.com), but currently don't take online orders or ship retail products. In spring 2005, Stone and Thistle Farm was recognized by National Geographic in an Appalachian eco-tourism feature. (See www.nationalgeographic.com/Appalachia.)

What you can learn from the Warrens

Here are 10 ways the Warrens reduce risks on their livestock farm:

1. Reduce production risks by raising a variety of livestock.
2. Process a variety of products in a variety of ways.
3. Market through multiple channels.
4. Use fencing and guard dogs to protect livestock from predators.
5. Rent neighboring fields when pasture forage is short due to drought.
6. Use breeds that thrive on pastures and are well-adapted to cold.
7. Work cooperatively with other producers.
8. Read and network to keep up with market trends.
9. Purchase general liability, product liability, and special event insurance as needed.
10. Prepare to deal with worst-case scenarios.

Stone and Thistle Farm was a founding member of the Meadow Raised Meats

Continued on next page

COWS AND CROPS

Klearview Farm Dairy: Downsizing And Specializing

By Bill Van Loo

Klearview Farm, operated by Don and Sharon Recore, has been in Sharon's family for more than 100 years. The couple bought the Franklin County, NY farm from Sharon's parents in 1973.

After 24 years of doing it all – growing and harvesting crops, milking cows and raising replacements – the Recores made a huge change. In 1997, the couple was experiencing difficulty cash flowing all the equipment and labor that went into their dairy operation. They felt there had to be a better system for their Klearview Farm, so Don and Sharon sold their cropping equipment to concentrate on milking cows.

Working closely with an accountant and Cornell Cooperative Extension, the Recores created a business plan. That plan paved the way for their decision to downsize their operation to something more manageable. The couple sold all their field crop equipment as they transitioned to paying a custom harvester for their hay and purchasing all of their corn silage. They also hired a custom grower to raise their heifers.

Continued on next page

COWS AND CROPS

Double Cropping – Potential for Intensive Animal Production

By Bill Henning

The number of opportunities that keep appearing for small farms is just amazing. I was struck by this fact again recently, while preparing a presentation for the Crops Congress in Yates County.

Many small farms produce livestock for a number of reasons. These can include time allocation, labor resources, land availability, personal preferences, or a host of other reasons. When land is a limiting factor and an individual is seeking an economic return, frustration often ensues from an extensive operation where the resources call for a more intensive operation.

Double cropping can offer the potential of significantly intensifying farming where land is the primary limiting factor. The double cropping addressed here involves Brown Mid Rib sorghum sudan (BMRss) and winter triticale planted to be harvested as a forage crop.

WHY THIS DOUBLE CROP?

This particular double-crop system offers a number of advantages. In a nutshell:

- Wide planting window
- Wide harvesting window
- Builds soil organic matter and structure
- Erosion control on highly erodible soils
- Aids in nutrient management
- Greater production than traditional crops
- Reduced likelihood of crop failure
- Consistent high forage quality
- Increases potential for high animal production
- Both crops are relatively drought tolerant

WIDE PLANTING & HARVESTING WINDOW

Winter triticale can be planted in late summer up to the middle of October in New York. In the system presented here it would be planted soon after the previous crop, BMRss, is harvested the last time– about mid September. BMRss can be planted about the beginning of June, immediately following the triticale harvest in the last week of May.

Obviously, seasons vary year to year. Two and sometimes three cuttings of BMRss can be taken through the summer and into fall. In most years expect two BMRss cuttings. In many instances these windows do not significantly compete with other cropping demands.

BUILDS SOIL ORGANIC MATTER AND STRUCTURE WHILE REDUCING EROSION

Since neither of these plants is a row crop, they provide fairly complete ground cover and an extensive root system. With non-inverting tillage, or no-till seeding, this residual plant material contributes to organic matter, and in turn, soil structure. There are close to eleven months of crops in some stage of growth. In April and May, when ground for row crops is often most vulnerable, we have an actively growing plant holding soil in place.

AIDS IN NUTRIENT MANAGEMENT

Both triticale and BMRss have superior ability, when compared to most traditional crops, to take up nitrogen and phosphorus

Continued on page 18

Klearview

Continued from prev. page

To downsize, the Recores didn't reduce the number of cows they milked but outsourced certain aspects of their dairy operation. The couple decided that they didn't want to manage the crops, youngstock and dairy. Rather, they wanted to just concentrate on what makes them the most money — the milking herd.

The transition accomplished several things for the Recores:

- It reduced the number of employees down to two.
- The Recores' milk production doubled after they made the transition and concentrated solely on their milking herd. Today, the couple milks 140 cows with a rolling herd average of 21,600 pounds, 3.8% butterfat and 3.2% protein.
- Cash flow improved immediately.
- Because the Recores' business plan made forecasts for retirement and the need to invest some money off the farm as well, they took steps to follow through on that.

During the transition, the Recores admit they had some doubts. But immediate improvements in cash flow helped ease their concerns. There were some bumpy times trying to find milkers for their dairy operation, but otherwise the transition was smooth, they say. The couple agrees that it was a good move for their dairy.

The Recores use a computerized accounting system and monthly cash-flow budgets to track their progress. They are looking forward to retiring in five years and moving to Florida.

The Recores say they wouldn't change anything about their decision to outsource crops production and heifer raising – other than they should have done it sooner. Their advice to others considering a change on their farm: Make sure the changes you want to make fit your particular operation and interests.

Bill Van Loo is an agriculture and rural economic vitality educator with Cornell Cooperative Extension of St. Lawrence County. This article one of a series of Profiles of Successful Strategies for Small Farm Dairies, produced by NY FarmNet/ NY FarmLink with a grant from The Northern NY Agricultural Development Program. Other small dairy success strategy profiles are available online at www.nnyagdev.org.

Sharon and Don Recore have maintained the 100-plus-year-old farming tradition at their Franklin County dairy by making farming more manageable. They contract for custom harvesting and heifer raising so they can concentrate on milk production. Photo by Mathew G. Cooper

Diverse

Continued from prev. page

Cooperative. Cooperatives, both formal and informal, allow risk and rewards to be spread over the membership. They can also help reduce costs and enhance prices, and provide access to new markets or improve bargaining strength. The cooperative gathered orders and shipped product. Today the Warrens cooperate with other farmers and local artisans to expand product offerings and draw more customers to their on-farm store.

Keeping abreast of consumer demand and market trends also helps to reduce market risks. Tom and Denise read extensively, attend meetings and network with other farmers. They even traveled abroad to the Terra Madre forum in Turin, Italy, a global gathering of "Slow Food" advocates, a movement that recognizes that the enjoyment of wholesome food is essential to the pursuit of happiness. (See www.slowfoodusa.org.) Even their children network at monthly 4-H meetings.

WORST-CASE SCENARIO

Small farms are particularly vulnerable to people risks because they usually rely on a very limited labor pool, in this case immediate family members. Like many family farms, the Warrens strive to maintain a safe work environment and to maintain strong family ties. They have invested in health and disability insurance – as well as in friendships and good neighbors in the event they need help due to some catastrophic event.

The Warrens face a myriad of legal risks, from the possibility of a visitor getting hurt while on the farm to a customer getting sick from a food product. They use good management practices and take necessary precautions to reduce the chances of anything going wrong, and are covered by both general liability and product liability policies. They also purchase special event insurance as needed, but they purchase no crop insurance.

One of the biggest risks for the Warrens is uninvited visitors. "People think our farm is a petting zoo and they can stop their car and get out and wander around," sighs Denise. "I have to pursue them and tell them that they are welcome to come back on Sundays at 1 p.m. when we conduct our tours. I explain to them that farms present real dangers for people, such as electric fences and guard dogs. These risks are taken care of when we open the doors on Sundays."

Multiple enterprises and diversified products and markets reduce production and marketing risks for Tom and Denise Warren, and their children Katey, Shane, and Reily. Photos courtesy Stone & Thistle Farm.

Like many farmers who are expanding and diversifying, Stone and Thistle farm does not have a formal risk management plan. Because there are so many other things that need to be done and the circumstances are always changing, a written plan is not yet a high priority. However, the Warrens have thought about worst-case scenarios.

"Losing electricity would be the worst thing that could happen to us," admits Denise. "We use electric fencing, so we would lose all of our animals. We would lose our fresh milk in the tank and the meat in the freezers. We don't have a generator at this time."

When asked if they had a contingency plan for this catastrophe, Denise responded, "No, but we are definitely buying a generator this fall."

For the Warrens, risk management means maintaining diverse enterprises and markets, using good management practices, producing quality products, developing an excellent reputation, using precautions especially when expecting visitors, insuring against the most threatening risks, and considering how to avoid the worst possible situation.

These are all action steps you can take, too.

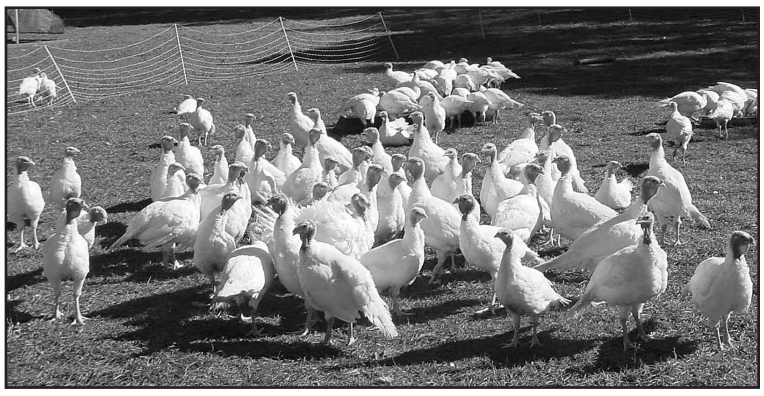
Martha Goodsell raises 1,700 deer and other livestock with the help of her husband and four children on a 425-acre, grass-based farm in Candor, N.Y. She is also the Executive Director of NY Farms!, a statewide coalition of organizations, individuals, businesses, agencies and institutions committed to the future of New York's farms and families.

NON-DAIRY LIVESTOCK

Breaking Through the Bottleneck in Marketing Meats

Access to USDA-inspected slaughter facilities is a major problem for livestock producers in the region. A new producer-controlled company is taking an innovative approach to the problem: Rather than building a new facility, the company will coordinate scheduling, quality control, and communications between producers and existing processors.

By Kathleen Harris



Small-scale producers of beef, poultry, lamb, pigs, venison and exotic livestock can now get help with processing. Sap Bush Hollow Farm, Warnersville, NY. Photos by Karin Edmondson.

More and more consumers are taking charge of their food. Not by growing it themselves, but by connecting personally with the farmers who are.

This is evidenced by the ever-growing popularity of farmers markets and on-farm stands where people can get good wholesome food. Where they can discuss its virtues face-to-face with the very farmer who produced it. Where they can have confidence in the food they are buying, and can contribute back to the farmers who have toiled so long and hard to produce it. It's a relationship that is gratifying and fulfilling to both parties.

Problem: The meat processing bottleneck In the case of marketing meats, however, there is one factor that continues to thwart the otherwise harmonious flow of goods from farmer to appreciative consumer. And that is the availability of USDA-inspected meat processing facilities.

According to the American Association of Meat Processors, 22% of USDA-inspected meat processing plants have closed in the last 5 years. Says Jim Hayes, a diversified livestock farmer in Schoharie County, NY, "We have carved out a direct marketing niche for our grassfed livestock, but without reliable meat processing that opportunity doesn't exist for many producers."

Response: The "service company" concept For the last four years, the Resource Conservation and Development Council of the Hudson-Mohawk Region (RC&D) has spearheaded one effort to address the processing problem. With assistance from the NYS Senate Majority, NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets, David Rockefeller Foundation, and Heifer Project International, their work began with producer/processor meetings and workshops, which yielded a feasibility study and ultimately a business plan prepared by a consulting firm.

A core group of producers served as the steering committee throughout the planning phase, and later became the Board of Directors for the Northeast Livestock Processing Service Company, LLC. They are dairy and livestock farmers with backgrounds from many fields including banking, law and academia. They are dedicated to working with existing processors for the ultimate purpose of sustaining agriculture in the region.

Their vision is clear and it has been captured in the NELPSC's mission statement: "To create a more profitable environment for farmers and livestock processors by developing a more efficient system which will offer better scheduling, act as a communication link between farmers and processors and help resolve quality control issues."

ADDRESSING PRODUCER AND PROCESSOR CONCERNS

After legally incorporating in 2005, the group hired a Processing Coordinator, Kathleen Harris, to carry out the business plan of the newly formed company. Starting with research and development, the company chose to address the major issues that had been revealed in the early foundation meetings and workshops. Producers had expressed concerns about dealing with processors with regard to low animal stress, accurate animal tracking procedures such that they can be assured of getting meat returned from their animal, realistic percentage returns of useable meat, consistent quality processing, and access to certified organic processing.

Processors, on the other hand, had expressed frustration about what they believe is over-regulation by USDA, and they are now seeking regulations more specific to small processors. They also need a more balanced, year-round workload. They are overburdened in the fall and early winter months when all the grass-based farmers want to market their livestock to avoid wintering over when the grass is gone. This pressure on their services is compounded by the influx of deer to be processed under custom-exempt, normally during off hours.

In developing the NELPSC program, all of these concerns are being addressed. At this time, the processors have been visited and agreements are in the making. Most have been very receptive to the NELPSC concept and their response has been favorable. In the meantime, the company is ready to start signing on producers.

NELPSC SERVICES

The Processing Coordinator will act as an advocate for participating farmers, negotiating for the best quality processing, processing discounts, and scheduling preference. She will communicate cutting instructions to processors, and will provide personal service and technical assistance to farmers regarding: gaining greater consistency in percent return of usable meat; quality control; humane animal handling; retail cuts and packaging; live animal readiness for processing; transport options; product storage for held inventory; and production recommendations for "sliding" livestock into off-season processing periods.

The NELPSC's services are available to all red meat and poultry farmers as well as those raising farm-raised venison and exotics. Livestock producers will pay a per-head fee, which will be offset in part by the discount NELPSC has negotiated with processors. "With the discount, livestock producers won't be paying that much more than they are now and with the oversight in quality, assistance in working with processors and technical assistance, this will turn out to be a valuable service," says Seymour Vander Veen, president of the NELPSC board.

This service also benefits meat processors who will be in contact with one processing coordinator for scheduling and cutting instructions rather than several farmers. It will also provide processors with more work, especially off-season as a result of the technical assistance to producers about "sliding" livestock into off-season processing periods.

FOR MORE INFO…

If you would like more information about the Northeast Livestock Processing Service Company please contact Processing Coordinator Kathleen Harris at (518) 673-5193 or by email at nelpsc@logical.net. You may also contact any of the Board of Directors: Seymour Vander Veen, President (518) 875-6687, John Walston, Vice-President (518) 851-2000 Edmund Armstrong, 2nd Vice-President (518) 622-9412, Jim Hayes, Secretary (518) 234-2105, Jim Sullivan, Treasurer (518) 573-0955.

Kathleen Harris is Processing Coordinator for the Northeast Livestock Processing Service Company.

ORGANIC FARMING

Three New Organic Dairy Initiatives Underway In the Northeast

Colleges and universities take note of major market opportunity for region's farmers

By Fay Benson

Since the Mid 1990's, certified organic dairy has been the fastest growing value added market for northeast dairy farmers. Consumers created this market by demanding dairy products that were produced without the use of antibiotics, hormones, and pesticides, and where animal welfare is a priority. Dairy farmers have responded to this demand by committing to the long and risky transition to certified organic dairy production.

In New York State alone there are approximately 150 certified dairy farms and 50 more in transition. The consumer's demand for the products still out paces the supply of organic milk. Organic dairy handlers agree that there is a shortage in the range of 4 to 5 tractor-trailer loads per day. At present this shortage is being bought into the state from large organic dairies in the west.

Organic dairy farmers, handlers, and state leaders across the Northeast would prefer to see this milk being produced by northeast farms. In response to this new market there are three new initiatives to help create a viable organic dairy industry in our region.

NY ORGANIC DAIRY AG INNOVATION CENTER

The new Organic Dairy Agricultural Innovation Center (AIC) was proposed last fall by the Small Farms Program at Cornell, and in January of 2006 was awarded funding from the New York Farm Viability Institute. With partners in Cornell Cooperative Extension, the Small Farms Program will extend the resources of this AIC throughout the state.

The objectives of the Organic Dairy AIC are to:

1. Establish a NY Organic Dairy Viability Task Force to address long-term issues facing the industry;
2. Develop and deliver new farm business planning tools, adapted for organic dairy, to producers around NYS; and
3. Help organic dairy farmers develop a "Whole Farm" decision-making format to use on their farms.

I am pleased to be serving as the project manager for the Organic Dairy AIC, under the auspices of Cornell's Small Farms Program. I've been involved with organic dairy issues and programming for many years, first as an organic dairy farmer myself, and in my current position as Small Farm Educator with Cortland County CCE.

ALFRED STATE'S NEW CENTENNIAL FARM

Alfred State College is seeking to "help shape the future of family farming locally, regionally, nationally, and globally" with development of its new Centennial Farm. A multi-million dollar "Smart Farm" business plan, formulated by Cornell Cooperative Extension educators James Grace and Joan Petzen and approved by President Gupta and her Cabinet, incorporates and expands on recommendations put forward last fall by an Alfred State College Farm Task Force.

The Centennial Farm will feature organic dairy, and sustainable agriculture education. The new dairy herd will consist of 140 milking age animals plus replacements, split into two parallel herds. One herd will be managed in accordance with Federal Organic Standards, and the other will be managed conventionally. A portion of the Centennial Farm will be certified organic.

The addition of a complementary organic herd and adoption of grazing will open up opportunities for faculty-student research studies and permit agriculture and veterinary technology students to investigate comparable care and treatment of animals.

UNH'S ORGANIC DAIRY

The University of New Hampshire will soon establish an organic dairy farm for research, education, and outreach, making it the nation's first land-grant university with an organic dairy.

Stonyfield Farm, the yogurt manufacturer of Londonderry, NH, has made a $200,000 leadership gift to the project, which carries an estimated price tag of $1.5 million. The new research dairy farm, located on a 200-acre parcel of certified-organic land at the university's Burley-Demeritt Farm in Lee, NH, will begin operation with the acquisition of 50 to 60 Jersey heifers. Construction of a composting-bedded pack barn and milking center, as well as acquisition of equipment and installation of fencing will occur in summer 2006.

Organic hay and baleage were already harvested for this winter's feed. This ambitious timeline allows for certified organic milk production to begin in December 2006. The farm will serve as both an applied research center for integrated organic production and management and an education center for organic dairy farmers, farmers undergoing or considering transition to organic, and students of sustainable agriculture.

A HEALTHY MARKET TAKES COOPERATION

These three initiatives are an indication of the market swing that is happening with consumers, as they make their vote with food dollars as to how they want their food produced. As with any successful market change, it takes the cooperation of the retailers who recognize the demand, the farmers who experiment how to meet the demand, and the Land Grant Universities who assist with research and extension education. In the organic dairy market these three entities are cooperating and working together to benefit everyone.

Fay Benson is Small Farm Educator with Cornell Cooperative Extension of Cortland County, and Project Manager for the New York Organic Dairy Ag Innovation Center. He can be reached through the Small Farms Program at 607-255-9227.

University of New Hampshire will soon establish a certified organic Jersey herd for research and teaching. Cornell University and Alfred State College are also launching organic dairy initiatives.Photographer: Bill Henning

Composting

Continued from page 9

odor is less of a concern. Also, the covered CBP does not collect rainwater and results in less material to spread, and lighter loads, compared to outside-stored liquid manure.

COW HEALTH AND PRODUCTION

Excellent cow health and high production can be achieved with a well-managed sand-bedded free-stall and the same has been claimed for the CBP's. Both provide a comfortable lying surface, confident footing and no restrictions to rising or lying down. Sand, an inorganic material, does not support bacterial growth when it is kept clean and dry. Daily removal of manure and weekly addition of fresh sand will take care of this.

In a CBP, heat from the active composting should reduce pathogen level, while excellent ventilation, ample bedding, twice-daily stirring, and sufficient space per cow are all needed to keep the surface dry. Damaged teats are more likely in a CBP than a free-stall barn.

SUMMARY

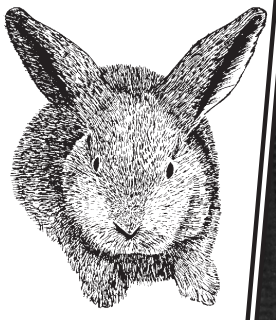
Be sure to look at all the angles as you consider various alternatives for housing your dairy herd. The initial cost of the barn is one factor in an economic comparison of different options; however, the more important factors in the long term include labor costs, bedding costs, and cow health and productivity. The latter of these will be governed mainly by management. If you are considering new dairy housing, feel free to contact me to discuss layout and management options, or visit www.ansci.cornell.edu/prodairy/facilities.

Frans Vokey is Dairy Educator with Cornell Cooperative Extension of Lewis County. He can be reached at 315-376-5270 or fjv2@cornell.edu. This article first appeared in South Central NY Dairy Digest, January 2006.

Small Farm Quarterly

Youth Pages

What? Rabbits?



Catherine and Houdini...the "escape" bunny...

By Catherine Anderson, Age 17, Orange County Hair Raisers 4-H Club

When I tell people that I raise rabbits their first response is usually something along the lines of "What!? Rabbits!?" Most people have no idea what raising and showing rabbits entails. It is a fun hobby that I really enjoy.

I have run into many challenges while raising rabbits in an urban area. The first was housing. Since there is limited space outside of our house, we house our animals indoors. This alone creates a problem. Proper ventilation is very important in the care of rabbits. If the ammonia in the air isn't circulated it could lead to many diseases and problems in the rabbitry. So, keeping up with cleaning is much more important when your rabbits are housed inside.

At first, we also faced some challenges on how to keep one of our animals in a cage. Initially, my one rabbit lived in my room in a plastic storage bin. As my rabbit got older he soon learned how to jump out of the bin. He was such an escape artist, we named him "Houdini". So, the next step was to build a mesh top to the cage. We thought this would fix the problem but it did not, he was still escaping. So we put heavy books like the dictionary and thesaurus on top. Not only did he still get out, but if you wanted to look up the word zebra it would be non-existent (rabbits like to chew!). After I joined 4-H I learned that proper housing for a rabbit includes a mesh bottom cage. The cage should be one square foot per pound of mature weight.

I have come across many advantages to raising rabbits indoors. Outside conditions can be harsh both in the winter and summer. The basic care of rabbits is made easier indoors during extreme weather. In the summer rabbits have to be kept cool and protected by the sun. A rabbit can get sunburned or sunstroke if left too long in the sun. In the winter the rabbit must be protected from snow and harsh winds.

I joined the Orange County Hair Raisers 4-H club when I got my first rabbit at the age of nine. I did so to learn how to take proper care of my new friend. I have also learned how to care for different diseases and problems that come up while raising rabbits. Not only does this information help in caring for my own rabbits but it also comes in handy for the various knowledge competitions that my club participates in. My club participates in rabbit science competition on both the county and state levels. We study hard and try our best.

Now when folks ask, "What? Rabbits?"…I say "Yes! Rabbits!".

For more information about raising rabbits visit www.ansci.cornell.edu/4H/rabbits.html.

FFA Winter Weekend

Report from New York District 7
Sam Fessenden, District 7 President, Southern Cayuga Central School

This winter, thirty members of the NYS FFA District 7 attended a fun filled weekend at Camp Oswegatchie in the Adirondacks of New York. Camp Oswegatchie is an environmental education center owned by the NYSFFA Foundation. Members spent the weekend hiking, camping and recreating on the camp's 1,200 acres northeast of Lowville.

The NY FFA District 7 consists of chapters in Cayuga, Onondaga, Oswego, Tompkins, Cortland and Tioga counties. FFA chapters arrived Friday night and settled in for the weekend. Southern Cayuga FFA, Cayuga Onondaga BOCES FFA and TST New Visions EAS Ithaca FFA chapters attended. Saturday morning, we started off with a tour of the camp for members who have not attended before. This session was followed by a mapping and compass workshop.

After the rain turned to snow around noon, many members went on a four-mile hike around Long Pond, the main body of water on the property. One of the highlights was crossing a 100-foot suspension bridge over an inlet. All the members made it across, with the only other option being to walk three miles back.

Saturday night, students went on a "night hike" with Todd Lighthall, the Camp Director. We went to two other ponds on the property. Members looked at the stars and listened to the sounds of the woods. Later that night, a few members decided to camp out in the woods for the night. After sleeping in a lean to, students made breakfast over a fire and enjoyed a crisp, clear morning. The temperature went down to seven degrees that night!

Sunday morning was for clean up and goodbyes. All members involved can say that they had a good time.

AGRICULTURE AND YOU

Brought to you by **New York Agriculture in the Classroom**
www.cerp.cornell.edu/aitc

CHALK it up to Agriculture!

Make your own sidewalk chalk using products of agriculture

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2 small dishes
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2. Measure flour and hot water into another dish. Stir until you get a paste. Add 1 tablespoon of the eggshell powder. Mix and mash until it all sticks together.
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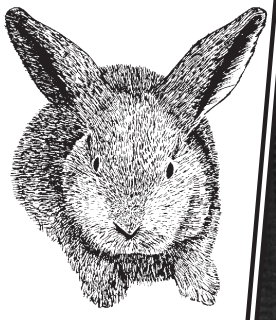

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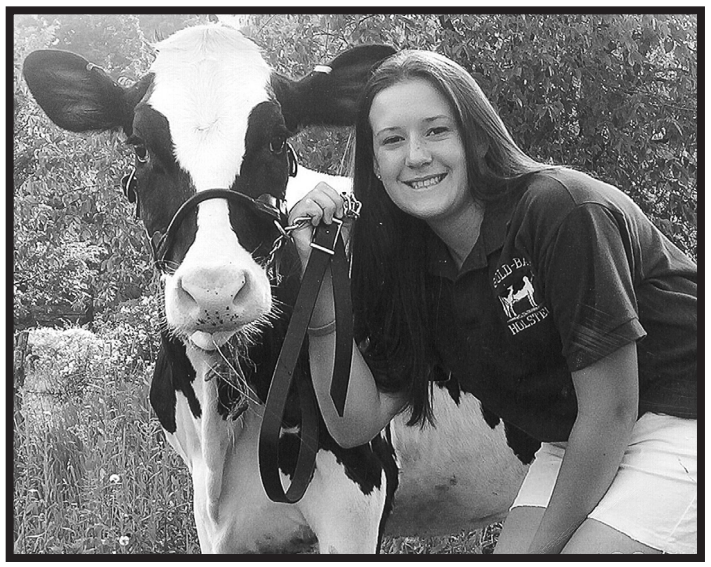


Crystal and her Holstein. Crystal works with a neighboring farmer to raise her animals.

Dairy Life

By Crystal Williams, Age 14, Orange County 4-H

Although I do not own my own dairy farm, I raise heifers at a barn a mile down the road from me. I usually feed all the calves at the barn 3-4 times a week and work with my heifers once a week. Raising heifers pretty much takes up all of my spare time, but I definitely wouldn't rather spend my time anywhere else.

Some of the chores I help out with at the barn include: feeding the calves, cleaning out the stalls, sweeping up the silage to the cows and I occasionally help out with milking. I have made many memories while being at the barn, but the funniest one I can remember would be a time when I was feeding the calves. I had stopped at the barn to quickly feed the calves before going out to dinner with family. Because I was running behind, I was trying my best to feed the calves as quickly as possible. I went to fill up my last bottle with milk, but because I was in such a rush I turned on the switch too fast and the milk came squirting out everywhere. I was drenched! It was too funny to be upset, all I could do was laugh at myself, along with everyone else who had witnessed it.

I have been a member of the Orange County 4-H dairy program for about two years. Some of the activities I participate in are: Dairy Bowl, Dairy Challenge, Dairy Judging, Dairy Level Day, Public Presentations and I also show Holsteins at the County Fair as well as Sussex.

Through the dairy project I have learned so many new things including many facts about cows, and today's dairy industry. I have also been on the Orange County Dairy Court serving as a Dairy Ambassador for two years.

For more information about dairy projects visit www.ansci.cornell.edu/4H/4hdairy.html.

Country Living

By Cassie Stokes, Age 11, Country Kickers 4-H Club, Orange County

I love living in the country. I can keep my horses in my back yard. It is always an adventure caring for my animals. Some people might complain about living in the country, but I never would - especially when I go outside to hear the birds and see the stars at night.

I belong to the Country Kickers 4-H club. I have been a member for 4 years. This year, I am the treasurer of the club. I am also a second-generation 4-Her. My mom was also in 4-H when she was younger and is now one of our club leaders. Our club has fun doing cooking projects, working on scrapbooks, and making crafts. We also learn about planting vegetables and flowers. We're always looking for new things to do, which makes it always fun.

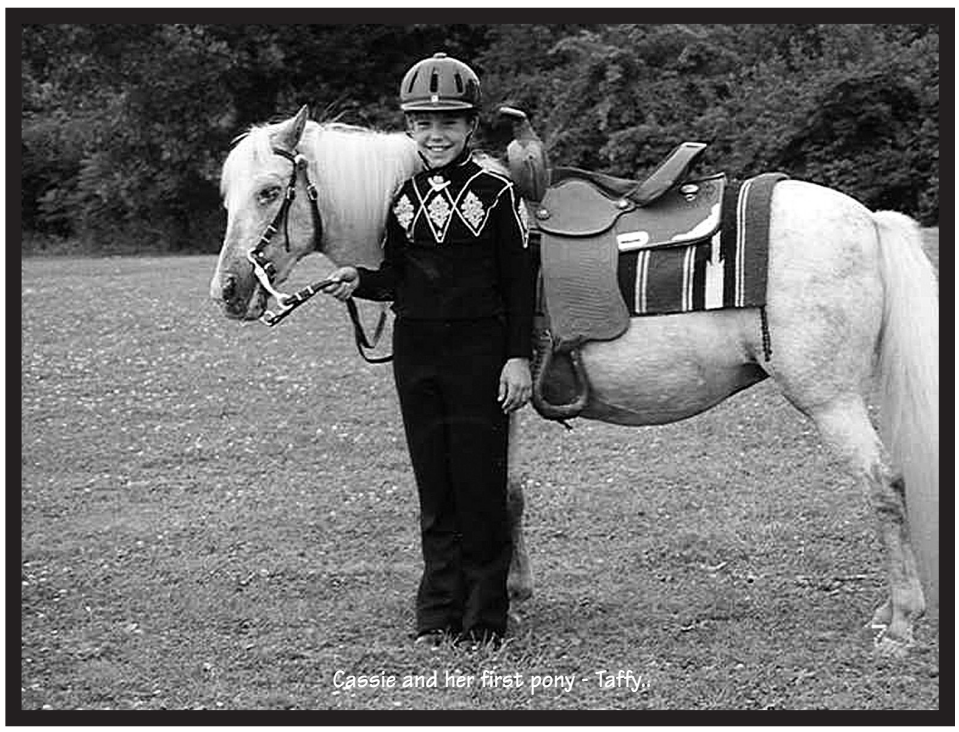
We also do several community projects each year, as it's good to help others and service is a part of 4-H. We have collected money and food for the local animal shelter and taken valentine cards to the local nursing home and also raised money and walked in the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation walk-a-thon. That is very personal because two of our members are juvenile diabetic. We have had to learn what diabetics can and cannot eat, so we always have something for our friends when we have snacks after our monthly meetings.

I like that our club does many different things. My brother Eric loves to bake apple pies, Ashley and Hunter are always winning the horticulture awards, Amber has a hundred rabbits she shows, Steven restores tractors, and I love horses. We just got several new members this year and I am sure they will all have something they like to do best too.

My favorite project is the horse program. I started the horse program when I was 8 with my little white pony Taffy. By doing the horse knowledge levels each year and the riding levels, which test our riding ability, I learned a lot and had fun at the same time. Taffy and I competed at the 4-H horse shows for two years. Now I have a new Quarter Horse named Maverick. He's a chestnut gelding who is very tall. Maverick and I just completed our Level II riding level this past November. I plan to show him this spring and summer at the local and 4-H shows and hopefully complete another riding level.

4-H has helped me learn many things I may not have had a chance to learn otherwise. The best part of it is that it's always fun, even when you're studying to pass a level test.

For more information about getting involved in your community visit http://nys4h.cce.cornell.edu.hoto.



Cassie and her first pony - Taffy.

Allison jumping her horse Teddy.

Learning from Horses

By Allison Rhoads, Age 16, 4-H Club, Orange County

I have learned many things from taking care of horses. For example, I have learned not to procrastinate. At the barn there are many chores that need to be done, so why not just do them and get it over with? I can apply this same principle to other areas of my life, such as schoolwork.

Every Wednesday I go up to North Wind Horse Farm and clean the barn. This includes mucking stalls, getting clean shavings, dumping and filling water buckets, giving the horses hay, and then feeding and bringing them inside for the night. It is a good way to teach me the value of hard work, while I learn how to work around horses.

I also meet with my 4-H horse club twice a month. I've learned a lot from this experience, including leadership. The older members of our club teach the younger members what is expected to keep a horse farm running. We learn how to safely handle horses and manage their care. This way we learn leadership and make sure that the circle is continued and there are always kids to lead and those to learn.

Working with horses has also taught me how many career opportunities there are, and how knowledgeable you have to be. By being around the farm, I see many of the diverse careers out there - from vets and farriers all the way to horse massage therapists and even horse psychics. If you want to work with horses, do not limit yourself; that's my belief.

From riding to caring, health to science, friendship to sportsmanship…horses sure can teach us a lot.

For more information about raising horses visit www.ansci.cornell.edu/4H/horses.

The Youth Page is written by and for young people. Many thanks to 4-H teens from Orange County, NY, for most of the material in this issue's Youth Page. We believe there's a bright future for young farmers in the Northeast. Whether you live on a farm or only wish you did, we'd love to hear from you! Write to: SFQ Youth Pages, c/o Celeste Carmichael, 4-H Youth Development Program Specialist, CCE State 4-H Youth Development Office, 340 Roberts Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853, 607-255-4799 • cjc17@cornell.edu

COMMUNITY/WORLD

Reconnecting Farms, Food And Communities

Cornell's Community, Food, and Agriculture Program celebrates two decades of Ag Development innovation

By Heidi Mouillesseaux-Kunzmann

When I'm asked what the Community, Food, and Agriculture Program at Cornell is all about, I often wonder if my immediate response shouldn't be "How much time do you have?"

Helping people to understand the connections between their food, the people and farms that produce it, and the communities they live in, requires more than a one-liner. I know I shouldn't be surprised. With fewer farms dotting the landscape, fewer people have the opportunity to learn about farming. And with more and more processed and prepared foods at the supermarket, it's pretty hard to imagine that dinner was once walking about, or caked with dirt after harvest.

Reconnecting farmers with local consumers and communities is one of the challenges faced by the folks that we work with. Known as "Agriculture Development Specialists" or "Agriculture Economic Developers," these individuals are trained in a variety of fields and are based in an equally diverse array of agencies and organizations. They are Extension educators, planners, economic developers, Resource Conservation and Development personnel, consultants, and staff of NGO's (non-governmental organizations.) Some of them are farmers or other concerned citizens who have taken on a leadership role.

While these professionals and community volunteers may approach agriculture development from different angles, they all see the link between the well being of their community and that of its farms. Vibrant farms -- and the independent agribusinesses and food businesses that depend on them -- make important contributions to the local economy. The families and employees that run them also contribute to local affairs, often serving in government and civic organizations. Local farms ensure a local source of healthy food, preserve open space and wildlife habitat, and provide recreational opportunities. In doing so, they help make rural areas the places that people want to stay in, move to, or visit.

Ag developers focus on bringing together farmers, food entrepreneurs, agribusinesses, consumers, and the community at large to address the problems and opportunities facing them in their communities. The Community, Food, and Agriculture Program (CFAP) works with them, providing research support, training programs, workshops, news and information, organizing assistance, and networking support. For example, CFAP has worked with agriculture developers in diverse communities to help them:

- Incorporate agriculture and food security concerns into local comprehensive community and economic development plans;
- Develop farmers' markets, shared-use kitchens, processing facilities, and other infrastructure;
- Provide business management training, beginning farmer training, farm diversification training, and opportunities for farmers to learn from and collaborate with each other;
- Educate community members and leaders, including local legislators, about agriculture and its relevance to community and economic development;
- Develop regional marketing initiatives that link rural and urban communities, tap ethnic and specialty markets, and connect farms to schools and other institutions.
- Create economic development and community identity opportunities, such as ag festivals, farm-neighbor days, agritourism initiatives; Buy-Local campaigns and regional identity programs.

CFAP researchers Duncan Hilchey and Gil Gillespie have been instrumental in the formation of the Heritage Grape Belt, a Western NY ag development initiative which will be featured in the Summer issue.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of CFAP's work to support these kinds of agriculture development initiatives. In these two decades, CFAP (and its predecessor the Farming Alternatives Program) has been at

Continued on next page

Double Cropping

Continued from page 13

and convert it to plant growth. Taking into account the aforementioned organic matter and soil structure attributes, double cropping these plants can significantly contribute to improved water quality.

GREATER PRODUCTION THAN TRADITIONAL CROPS

BMRss can yield as much as 5 tons of dry matter over the course of its multiple cuttings. Winter triticale can produce typical yields of about three tons of dry matter per acre. Coupling theses two crops can result in an eight-ton dry matter yield. It would take about 24 tons of corn silage (as fed) to equal that.

But that's not all. The triticale can be grazed in the fall – extending the grazing season. With proper management, this additional harvest will not impact the next year's yield. And one more point: These two crops can accomplish high production on marginal soils where alfalfa or corn could not compete successfully.

CONSISTENT HIGH FORAGE QUALITY

Both of the crops, harvested as forage, will rival corn silage for energy. When BMRss' digestibility is accounted for it will actually top corn silage for animal production per acre. Each of these crops can produce protein levels in excess of 15% when properly fertilized. Wide windows of opportunity in planting and harvesting lend to the consistency. A combination of corn silage and alfalfa will be hard pressed to match both the energy and protein yield of this double crop.

HIGH ANIMAL PRODUCTION

This system can be excellent for supplementing the 'summer slump' in grazing operations. Both crops provide excellent nutrition for sustained high production when animals are in confinement. In dairy production they can reduce the grain portion of the ration, which can then raise milk components without sacrificing herd average. These crops will do nicely to enhance beef and sheep feeding, actually eliminating the need for grain in many cases.

DROUGHT TOLERANCE AND REDUCED LIKELIHOOD OF A CROP FAILURE

Both crops are drought tolerant. Given the radical climatic swings we have seen in recent years this cropping system offers an additional hedge. If you have droughty soils to begin with the system produces crops that can do well while providing a means to build your ground's water holding capacity. Combined with the multiple windows of management there is a greater chance of successful harvests.

THERE IS NO FREE LUNCH

This doubling cropping system calls for intensive management, monitoring soil needs, and high levels of fertility. Two plantings per year and multiple harvests have to be planned and labor must be available when it is needed. Suitable equipment, in good repair, is also a necessity.

This is not everybody's answer. But for those who have the other resources, or can find a way to provide them, it opens up an opportunity to turn frustration into reward.

Bill Henning and his wife Kathleen operate a grass-based beef and sheep farm in the Finger Lakes region of New York. He is also the Small Farms Specialist with PRO-DAIRY/CCE-NWNY Dairy, Livestock, and Field Crops Team.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Agriculture Feeds Us - Could It Also Fuel Us?

By Les Hulcoop

With energy costs on the increase, the alternative energy discussion has once again captured our attention. Sources other than fossil fuel, natural gas and coal have been around a while. Some longer then others. We all can name a few: solar, wind, water, geothermal, nuclear, hydrogen fuel cells, methane, plant biomass (wood or grass), plant oil, recycle cooking oil...

All of these sources offer promise, and they all have challenges associated with their production and use. There are many resource people, publications and companies that focus on these different alternative energies. A search of the Internet offers thousands of sites with information on alternatives.

Could local farms grow alternative energy crops? Lets for a moment focus on two alternative fuel sources that could be grown on farmland here in the Northeast. Locally grown grasses could be processed into solid fuel for heating. Oil crops, such as soybeans or rapeseed could process into bio-diesel.

GRASS AS A HEAT SOURCE

The Northeast has a considerable acreage of unused and underutilized agricultural land, much of which is reverting to shrubby growth or woodlands. Select species of grasses, for example, switchgrass, could be grown on some of this land, processed and used for heat. Grass pellets have great potential as a low-tech, small-scale, environmentally friendly, renewable energy system that can be locally produced, locally processed and locally consumed.

As we focuses on energy security, grass bio-energy is one of the ways that communities can move towards energy security. In some cases grass bio-energy can be produced and used within a 20-mile radius of a rural farming community. The worldwide energy crunch is not going to disappear, as we are reminded with the increases in energy prices. Sooner or later we will be forced to invest in alternative fuel supplies. Progress towards self-sufficiency is progress towards energy security.

An ideal biofuel source should have the following traits: 1) Cost-effective renewable energy supply. 2) An efficient conversion process. 3) High rural economic development potential. 4) High grower acceptance. 5) Environmentally friendly. 6) A positive impact on greenhouse gas production.

Perennial grass has the potential to meet all of the above criteria. Any mixture of grasses can be cut in mid to late summer, left in the field to leach out minerals, then baled and pelletized. Drying of the grasses is not required, making the cost of processing less than with wood pelleting. Grasses as an energy source may fit into a production plan of small farms. This "bio-grass" could offer another revenue steam for the farmer.

PLANT OILS AS BIOFUEL

The biofuel on many people's mind is bio-diesel for use in trucks and buses. It can also be used as a heating fuel blended with heating oil. The production of bio-diesel and other plant oils has been mainly in the Mid-west where large acreages of these crops are grown. However, New York State will soon have two production facilities on-line. Currently New York is using bio-diesel and ethanol that is processed outside the New York.

Part of what makes bio-diesel so appealing and interesting is that it can be made from numerous natural sources. Although animal fat can be used, plant oil is the largest source of bio-diesel. Scientists and engineers can use oils from familiar crops such as soybean, rapeseed, canola, palm, cottonseed, sunflower, and peanut to produce bio-diesel. Bio-diesel can even be made from recycled cooking oil!

Bio-diesel is a clean burning alternative fuel, produced from domestic, renewable resources. Bio-diesel contains no petroleum, but it can be blended at any level with petroleum diesel to create a bio-diesel blend. It can be used in diesel engines with little or no modifications. Bio-diesel is simple to use, biodegradable, non-toxic, and essentially free of sulfur and aromatics.

Most oil crops are grown on large acreages, therefore may not be economical for small scale farm operations. Finding an oil crop that can be economical to grow on these farms is evolving. Rapeseed, a cool weather oil crop is being explored as a potential "double crop" for small farms in New York.

Mother Nature helped us reduce our energy bills this last heating season with a moderate winter. But we must look to future winters; continue to think conservation today and alterative fuels for tomorrow.

Les Hulcoop is Agriculture, Farmland Protection and Farm Marketing Specialist with Cornell Cooperative Extension of Dutchess County. He can be reached at (845) 677-8223, ext.130 or lch7@cornell.edu.

Reconnecting

Continued from prev. page

the cutting edge of numerous ag development innovations that have helped to revitalize agriculture in the region: farming alternatives and diversification, agritourism, farm-neighbor relations, farmers' markets, farm-to-school, value-adding, Buy-Local, regional identity, Community Supported Agriculture, ethnic markets, specialty cheese, culinary tourism.

CFAP ROOTS: THE FARMING ALTERNATIVES PROGRAM

The evolutionary process started in 1986 when, in response to one more economic crisis among dairy farmers, CFAP was launched as the "Farming Alternatives Program." At that time, the program focused on research, training and outreach materials designed to help struggling dairy farmers transition into more diverse and hopefully, more profitable agricultural enterprises. In 1998 FAP published Farming Alternatives: A Guide to Evaluating the Feasibility of New Farm-Based Enterprises, and award winning publication that is still widely used by farmers and educators.

While these efforts undoubtedly helped many farmers to stay in business and others to start successful businesses, it soon became clear that even the most well-trained producers wouldn't succeed without better developed markets. FAP began to focus on ways to connect farmers and consumers. While this also helped, it soon became clear that this was still not enough. There are additional, more complex problems that producers and consumers can't overcome as individuals. Problems that require communities (as well as regions, states, the nation) to rethink and reinvent their relationships with agriculture.

The Farming Alternatives Program began to explore and then to foster community-based initiatives to support local agriculture. In 1995 FAP published Community Agriculture Development: Profiles of 32 Initiatives in NYS. This marked the beginning of a growing awareness of agriculture's potential to serve as an "engine" of economic and community development. Within a few years "agricultural economic development" was being promoted by the NYS Department of Agriculture and Markets, policymakers, and agricultural economists at Cornell. Agriculture Development Specialist were being hired by counties across the state, and soon, across the nation.

FAP continued to play a leadership role in ag development research, education and professional development, and in 2002 changed its name to the Community, Food, and Agriculture Program. Now, twenty years after its founding as the Farming Alternatives Program, CFAP remains committed to the mission of sustaining farms and communities. Today, our work is based on three premises:

- Thriving farms produce not just food and fiber, but multiple public benefits: support for the local economy and civil society, open space, wildlife habitat, clean water (compared to residential and commercial land uses,) recreational opportunities, and the "rural character" of communities and landscapes.
- To thrive, farms and related businesses require the active support of the communities that they benefit.
- Community members and developers, in turn, need to know how to support farms and farm-related businesses, and how to partner with them in order to realize their potential public benefits.

True to Cornell's Land Grant mission, CFAP is committed to understanding and acting on the needs of the people of New York. We work closely with our primary stakeholders, the agriculture development professionals described above, who are putting ag development concepts and principles to work in communities across the state. We also work with farmers, ag-related businesses, and their organizations.

CFAP maintains an active portfolio of action-research projects, identifying and analyzing emerging ag development opportunities in collaboration with partners in the field and across campus. Our professional development programs assist practitioners in gaining skills, knowledge and experience. Public outreach includes educational workshops, seminars, presentations, and numerous print and web-based publications. (You can view these resources online at: www.CFAP.org).

Over the next several issues of Small Farm Quarterly, we will be following up on this introduction with a series on "Reconnecting Farms, Food and Communities: Agriculture Development in the Northeast," highlighting some examples of CFAP's recent work with ag developers and their communities. We hope you will find them inspiring and informative.

Heidi Mouillesseaux-Kunzmann is the Coordinator of Cornell's Community, Food, and Agriculture Program. She can be reached at 607-255-9832 or hmm1@cornell.edu. You can find out more about CFAP at www.cfap.org.

MANAGING RISK

Farm Equipment on the Highway

If Only We Could Walk in the Other Person's Shoes

By Bill Henning

In the last issue of *Small Farm Quarterly* an article "So You Thought the Slow Moving Vehicle Emblem was Adequate?" drew a fair amount of feedback. This follow-up article might reveal some interesting aspects of human nature that are both problems and opportunities.

To begin a follow-up article, I interviewed Sgt. Jeff Stall and Trooper Bill Mills of the Commercial Vehicle Enforcement Division of the New York State Police. They provided a summary of the more important issues farmers need to be aware of (See "Farm Vehicle Regulations" by Jennifer Beckman.)

BAD ATTITUDE?

In that interview I also became aware of an attitude that pervades some rural roadways. The officers told me that when they stop a farm vehicle relative to regulations it is not uncommon for the farmer to act in a confrontational manner -- "I've done it this way for thirty years and I'm not about to change now!" "I don't have time to do that!" "I won't do it!"

But wait. Before you take personal offense, let me say that farmers are not the only people displaying that attitude. Town road supervisors have even displayed it. While this attitude is on the decline, it still exists. How do you suppose an officer is going to respond to that?

On the flip side of the coin, some farmers feel that law enforcement thinks without them we are incapable of being safe. The farmer has done it thirty years and has never had a problem. I must admit to falling into this category on more than one occasion, both as a truck driver and as a farmer. And, if we don't control our emotions, we end up begrudging an officer for our own oversight.

RISKING OTHER'S SAFETY

Farmers are used to taking risks. We get in trouble when we expect others to share in those risks. The reality is, for example: An unsecured load of round bales going down the road at 40 MPH can quickly become a blast of projectiles on their collision course with an innocent bystander. And the innocent bystander is the third person in this picture.

My family accuses me of eating, sleeping, walking, and talking farming. But even I get aggravated by a piece of farm machinery taking up his half of the highway plus mine. Worse than that, are the multitudes of drivers exercising little or no common sense. Like it or not, it is our responsibility to allow for them. If you don't agree with that try arguing your case in a court of law.

A CAUTIONARY TALE

Which brings us to the second interview and the litigation factor. Rodney Brown farms in Ontario County. Rodney is not the type of person to shirk responsibility and he is also a very busy farmer. About 12 years ago an employee was taking a full slurry spreader down the road at about 3 AM to spread in a nearby field. The flashers were not working but the red light and the work light on the tractor cab were clearly visible from behind the spreader. It was rear-ended by a drunk who never even hit the brakes.

Accidents are unexpected, spontaneous, and often catastrophic. Photo by Bill Henning

Without even considering the dollar cost, the canceled insurance, and the emotional wear and tear, Rodney lost the equivalent of an entire week of farm work. Rodney's advice based on his experience:

- The Slow Moving Vehicle emblem means little or nothing to most people;
- Keep your flashers working and keep them clean; and
- Realize you're in other people's way.

We realize there are dangers involved in farming. With all the risks involved, why not eliminate the ones we can, especially those that are relatively easy to overcome? If only we could walk in the other person's shoes, we might come to realize that the traffic citation we've just been issued is really for our own benefit.

Bill Henning and his wife Kathleen operate a grass-based beef and sheep farm in the Finger Lakes region of New York. He is also the Small Farms Specialist with PRO-DAIRY/CCE-NWNY Dairy, Livestock, and Field Crops Team.

MANAGING RISK

Farm Vehicle Regulations

By Jen Beckman

As we travel the roads with our farm equipment, it is important to keep in mind the regulations that have been made to keep ourselves and our fellow travelers safe. I recently spoke with the NYS DOT Trooper in charge of vehicle regulations for our region. He sent me a copy of the traffic law that pertains to farm equipment. In the article below, I've tried to interpret the law into a more readable form.

REGULATIONS PERTAINING TO FARM EQUIPMENT

1. At a minimum, all tractors and implements must have a slow moving vehicle sign. These signs fade with time; it is recommended to replace them every 2-3 years. Reminder – Slow Moving Vehicle signs are only for vehicles traveling under 25 mph and are not meant for any other purpose (i.e. driveway or mailbox markers.)

2. If on a public highway after dark or when visibility is less than 1000 ft due to bad weather, requirements include:

- 2 white headlights on front of tractor
- One red tail lamp at the farthest end (tractor or implement) and as far to the left as practical
- 2 amber combined hazard warning and turn signal lamps at least 42 inches high, visible from front and rear. If just a tractor, these lights can be on the cab. If traveling with an implement, these lights need to be mounted at rear of implement.
- 2 red reflectors at the rear of the implement

AN IMPORTANT EXCEPTION:

If the width of tractor/implement combination is between 12 and 17 feet, you cannot travel on public roads after dark. When traveling during daylight, red or orange fluorescent flags -- not smaller than 18 square inches -- and reflectors need to be placed at extreme corners of the load. In addition, 2 flashing amber lights or hazard lights visible from the rear of the load must be flashing. If the vehicle or implement extends beyond the center line or is traveling during inclement weather, the implement should be preceded by an escort vehicle with a warning sign and flashing lights.

EVERY ANIMAL DRAWN VEHICLE MUST DISPLAY ON THE REAR:

1. A Slow Moving Vehicle sign
2. A lighted lantern with a red lens at least 4 inches in diameter, mounted 42 inches above the ground, and at least 72 square inches of high quality white or whitish-gray reflective tape.

To obtain copies of the regulations or for other questions regarding farm traffic rules, contact your local State Trooper Headquarters and ask for the Traffic Sergeant or Traffic Section. To find phone numbers for the troop that covers your area, visit: www.troopers.state.ny.us/Contact%5FUs/Troop%5FInformation/.

Jennifer Beckman is Field Crops Extension Educator with Cornell Cooperative Extension of Lewis County. She can be reached at 315-376-5270, or jlb257@cornell.edu.

Resource Spotlight

Apply Early For An FSA Loan

The USDA Farm Service Agency is committed to providing family farmers with loans to meet their farm financial needs. If you are having difficulty getting the financing you need for your farm, or regularly borrow from FSA, direct and guaranteed loans are available now. Applying early is important so that a loan can be processed and funded timely. Ask your lender about an FSA loan guarantee if you have had a setback and your lender is reluctant to extend or renew your loan.

Most of our loan programs have special funding available for minority, female and beginning farmers. FSA employees will help you complete the necessary application and other forms, and help you understand what information is required, where to find it or who to contact to get it. To find out more about FSA loan programs, contact the office serving the county where you live or visit our website at www.fsa.usda.gov.

Submitted by Christy A. Marshall, Farm Loan Chief with USDA Farm Service Agency in Syracuse, NY. Christy can be reached at 315-477-6341.

STEWARDSHIP AND NATURE

Fringe Benefits

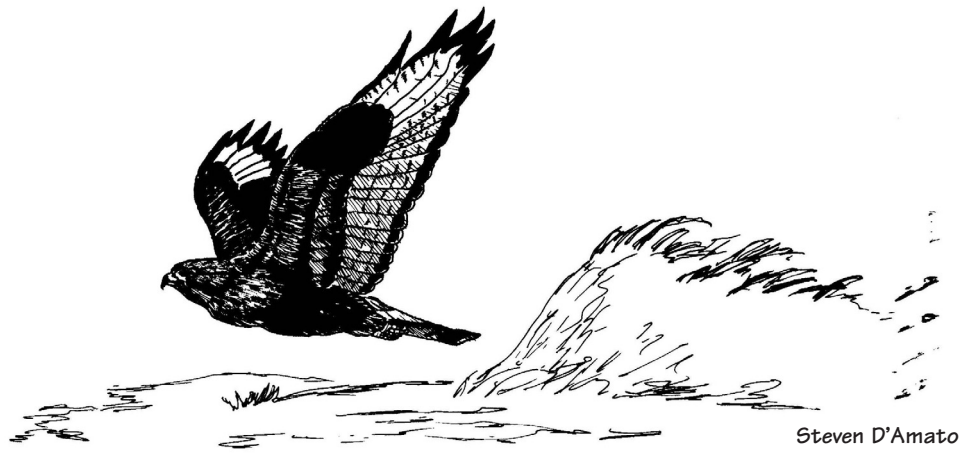
By David Kline

Editor's note: *We are pleased – and honored -- to welcome well-known Ohio farmer and author David Kline as a new regular contributor to Small Farm Quarterly.*

Last year our growing season started in cool and dry. We turned the cows out on grass in mid-April—beginning as we ended the previous fall—on large paddocks. As April turns to May, the usual pattern is for the paddock size to shrink as the pastures head for their spring flush of growth.

A year ago that didn't occur. It was almost June and its warmer temperatures, before much growth developed. The fences were moved in, the meadowlarks and bobolinks began nest-building, and we settled in for a summer of good grazing.

Then temperatures hit 90 degrees and it quit raining. Or rather the rains retreated to widely scattered showers; showers that tended to move to the north and south of us. But we managed to shift and rotate pastures and grazed some fields meant for hay and watched for rain-laden clouds.



Steven D'Amato

By August the over-heated waters of the Gulf of Mexico became calving grounds for hurricanes and, I know it sounds almost sinful, raised our hopes for rain. First Dennis, but blocked by a high-pressure system to the east, that storm fizzled and died in southern Illinois and brought us no relief. Then Katrina rounded the tip of Florida as a Category 1 hurricane and quickly juiced up to a Category 5 and the rest is history.

Katrina provided us with four inches of gentle rain over 24 hours, plus some more from Rita, and we had the best fall pasturage in our three plus decades of dairying. When it wintered in at the end of November a lot of forage was left in the fields and thereon hangs this story—the meadow voles were in winter haven.

Following the first snowfall, red fox tracks crisscrossed the fields searching out the mice and soon the first rough-legged hawks appeared from their Arctic summer homes and began to hunt the fields and feed on the fat little rodents.

Every roughleg I see flying overhead has the distended crop of a well-fed hawk. A pair of roughlegs has stayed with us all winter. I see them daily as they quarter and course the fields. The handsome raptors from the Arctic have given us much pleasure. There is something about the rough-legged hawk that is so attractive.

Although similar to our local red-tailed hawk, which in winter looks almost pure white from below, the roughleg is strikingly different with its white underwings sharply highlighted by black elbows and wingtips. It also sports a broad dark belly belt and black tail band. When the roughleg wheels and turns in flight its white rump is visible. Definitely a hawk in a tuxedo.

Yesterday, while I was spreading manure, I watched the two roughlegs and three red-tails hunting over the one six-acre field at the same time. Against the blue mid-day sky and catching the reflection of the light snow on the ground, the contrast between the species was remarkable.

There is a dark morph of the rough-legged hawk, which occurs in about 10 percent of the population. It has no white rump patch, but does have beautiful silver underwings, although the black elbow is missing. When perched it is as black as a raven.

Many rough-legged hawks are wintering in this community. They must have had an excellent hatch last year. The number of eggs laid by the rough-legged hawks, as with the snowy owls, depends on their Arctic food supply. When the lemmings are abundant, larger clutches occur. Is the Arctic warming, along with the Gulf of Mexico, and providing a milder environment for the lemmings and the roughlegs? These are thoughts I ponder as I spread fertility on the fields and watch the dancing horned larks.

David and his wife Elsie, along with their family, milk about 40 cows near Fredericksburg, Ohio. David has authored two books: Great Possessions and Scratching the Woodchuck. He also edits Farming Magazine, published by Friends of the Agrarians. Sample copies are available for $5. Subscriptions are $18/year for four issues, or $32 for two years. Write: P.O. Box 85, Mt. Hope, OH 44660; e-mail: farmingplc@aol.com.

Check out the Small Farms Web Site!

www.smallfarms.cornell.edu

We Want to Hear from You!

We welcome letters to the editor -- Please write to us!
Or send a question and we'll do our best to answer it.
We're also looking for beautiful, interesting, and/or funny small farm photos to print.

Write or email Joanna Green,
Cornell Small Farms Program,
135C Plant Science Building, Cornell University,
Ithaca, NY 14853, jg16@cornell.edu.

FOREST AND WOODLOT

Are You Growing Nuts?

Since 2002 the New York Nut Growers Association has been working hard to promote nut research, education, and conservation.

By John Wertis

Beech Hill, Beechmont Woods, Butternut Grove, Chestnut Ridge, Hickory Corners, Hickory Bush, Oak Orchard and more than a dozen other oak named municipalities that are indexed in a current *New York State Atlas and Gazetteer* suggest how important nut trees were to the settlers and their descendants during the Golden Age of Homespun in New York State.

During the mid-to-late 1800's farmers and horticulturists were "domesticating" the wild trees, identifying, and propagating by grafting hundreds of named cultivars of the various species of our native nut trees. The application of scientific principals of genetics to nut tree improvement accelerated during the 1900's. Researchers, like L.H. MacDaniels at Cornell University, established experimental plantings and explored the viability of commercial nut orchard production. They knew that nuts are tasty and nutritious. Many of us agree and pursue their goals today…many of us are members of the New York State Nut Growers Association.

NYNGA grew out of a meeting at Alfred State University in the spring of 2002. Tom Potts, a grower and promoter of Filbert (Hazelnut) production, sent out the initial invitations. He and several other members of the long established Northeast Nut Growers Association saw the value of getting New York State nut growing enthusiasts together for mutual support and exploration of these techniques. At a later meeting, the organization toured the Olsons' extensive nut tree plantings in the Findley Lakes area in the southwest corner of the state.

At the same initial meeting, John Gordon, horticulturist and Hickory expert from the Amherst region of the state, also demonstrated some grafting techniques and spoke about hybrid Chestnut cultivars. Donn Cobb, "edible oak" expert and chair of the NNGA Oak Committee, donated various seedling plants that were given to interested attendees at that meeting. The following summer the newly formed association met at the Cobb's home and nut tree plantings at Waterloo.

As NYNGA has matured it has expanded its initial membership base from a mere handful to some 35 dues paying members. The beauty and the bedevilment of our organization is that these members are scattered broadly across New York State. It has exposed us to the amazing diversity of the Empire State; but it is always a long drive for some members to attend meetings. Through the activities of our Treasurer, Colleen Green of Perry, we are close to achieving not-for-profit status. We are at a point where we can more actively support the interests of the nut growing hobbyist and those exploring the commercial aspects of nut growing in the state.

More recent meetings have taken us to the Cornell Plantations at Ithaca, where Dr. Ken Mudge of the Ag College's Horticulture Department introduced us to the MacDaniels' nut tree plantings on the hillside overlooking Cascadilla Creek. He uses this site as an outdoor classroom in his teaching of Agroforestry to undergraduates and is using the site for continuing nut tree research. Dr. Chris Cash and others at SUNY Cobleskill hosted a meeting there. We toured the facilities and did some hands-on-grafting. Tom Molnar, now on the staff at Rutgers University, gave a talk on Eastern Filbert Blight and described that college's on-going research in Filbert propagation and nut production. We enjoyed a great meal there, topped off by Walnut Brownies prepared from a recipe developed by the School of Culinary Arts on the campus.

In the Spring of 2005 we journeyed to the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation Tree Nursery at Saratoga Springs. A meeting was held at Woodward's Walnut World at Medina. To our knowledge, Francis Woodward and family operate the only "commercially producing" Black Walnut orchard in New York State. Francis took us through the history of his nut grove and demonstrated the many steps in preparing the harvest for sale…tree shaking, nut gathering, dehulling, washing, drying and packaging. He employs some expensive commercial nut production equipment and a lot of ingenuity in his operation.

Other meetings have taken us to the Rockefeller State Park nut plantings at Tarrytown, the St. Lawrence Nursery at Canton (cold-hardy North Country plants), the Fahey's orchards at Oxford, a meeting focusing on land-owner issues at Pittsford, and last fall we returned to "Founding Father" Tom Potts' plantings on his property at Belmont. Networking has been a major focus. All the hosts at these various sites welcome questions and visits from nut growing enthusiasts. NYNGA members will be glad to field questions or connect you with a known expert.

THE CARPATHIAN WALNUT PROJECT

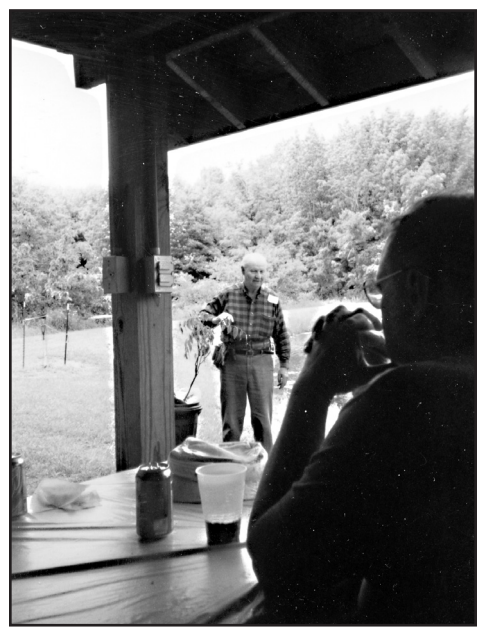
We are in the midst of a major fund-raising and on-going study project. The well-known nurseryman, Ernest Grimo of Niagara-on-

Continued on next page

NYNGA members taking notes in the Olsen's nut tree orchard, Findley Lake, NY.

A young walnut well mulched and protected by a tree tube.

Malcolm Olsen "making a point" about orchard management.



Nurseryman John Gordon demonstrating a grafting technique.

A grafted walnut protected from deer damage.

NEW FARMERS

Land of Opportunity

Immigrant farmers put down roots in Holyoke, Massachusetts

By Eric Toensmeier

Finding and procuring 4.1 acres of rich farmland just outside an urban center is no small feat. But Nuestras Raíces (NR), a grass-roots organization that promotes economic, human, and community development, did just that.

Based in Holyoke, Massachusetts, NR carries out their mission through projects related to food and agriculture. Fittingly called Tierra de Oportunidades (TDO) or Land of Opportunities, their new farm is being developed as an incubator site for beginning farmer enterprises.

This prime property is located on the Connecticut River, boasts world-class Hadley loam, and is home to several at-risk and endangered species, including the bald eagle. Yet the Massachusetts Turnpike is a scant one mile away as is one of the largest shopping malls in the northeast. The striking juxtaposition is poignant in an environmental sense, yet also provides easy access to the project.

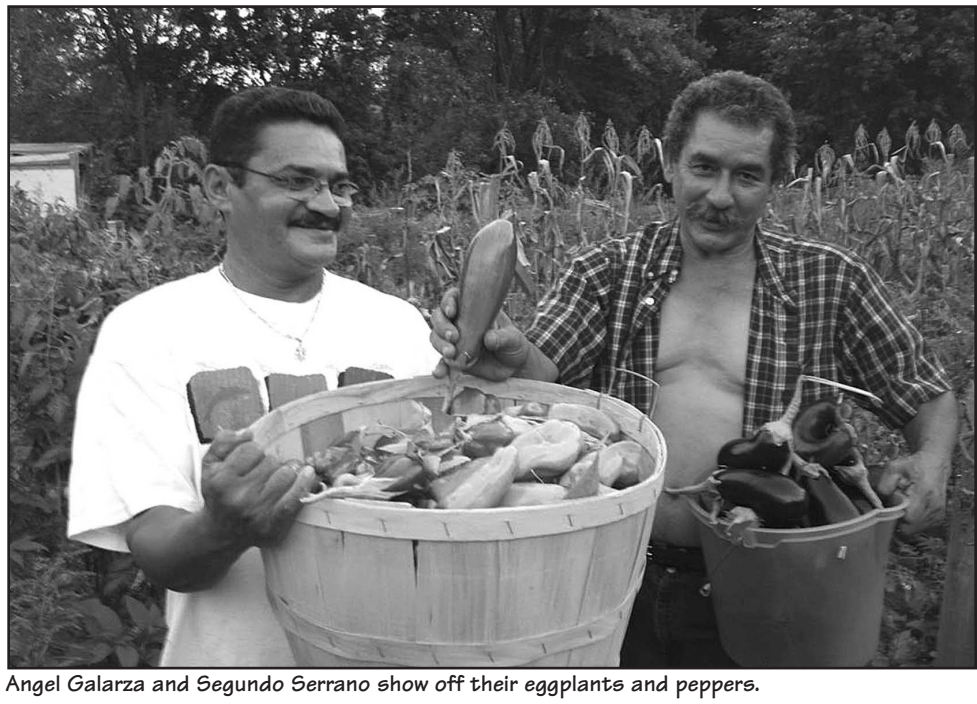
A significant number of Holyoke residents grew up farming in Puerto Rico. While many of them aspire to continue this tradition, they are faced with substantial barriers, particularly the language gap and access to land and capital. TOD offers a means of overcoming these hurdles.

Each prospective farmer takes part in a brief training course offered in Spanish. First we review the realities of farming in the Northeast US, helping participants make the decision as to whether this path is truly the right one for them. This "reality check" is followed by the development of a production, marketing, and financial plan. A committee of farmers, business experts, and community organizers then reviews each plan; the most viable ones are selected for participation in the program. After three years, a farmer is eligible to apply for a small business loan through Farm Service Agency.

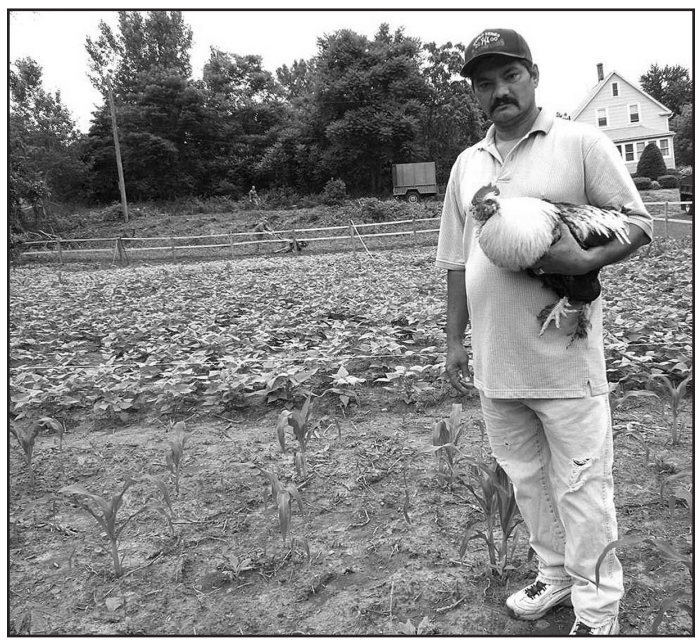
The hands-on part of the project began in fall 2004 with the rigorous task of reclaiming the land, which had not been cultivated in twenty-five years. Luckily many of the TOD farmers were experienced with cutting sugar cane and were already adept with the machete. In the winter of 2004-5, TOD held its first training course, a prerequisite for participating in the project. Many of these aspiring farmers were already members of Nuestras Raíces' urban community gardens. Now they can spread their wings, working on a larger scale that opens doors to increasing profits.

In the spring of 2005, six farmers began to work the land, honoring their native land and tastes by raising specialty Puerto Rican vegetables and herbs (e.g., calabaza, recao, ají dulce, cilantrillo, sorghum). Small livestock such as chickens, rabbits, goats, and pigs were also integrated into the system. Farmers currently pay $25 per month for a quarter-acre plot.

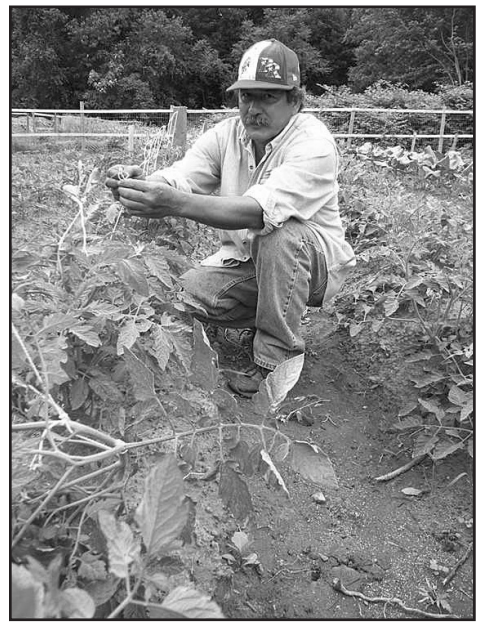
Marketing opportunities include the Holyoke farmers' market and Nuestras Raíces' own restaurant, bakery, and shared-use commercial kitchen (for value-adding or sales to existing food processing businesses). Advertising costs are minimal as both of these organizations already have communications in place with the public. The outlook includes forging relationships with local restaurants, adding an on-site farm stand with a café, and developing a women's entrepreneur network and a cooperative to provide flowers and food for weddings.



Angel Galarza and Segundo Serrano show off their eggplants and peppers.



Participants also have the opportunity to raise small livestock such as chickens, rabbits, goats, and pigs. Here Fermin Galarza is shown with a favorite rooster.



Segundo Serrano ties up a tomato plant on his plot at Tierra de Oportunidades. Farmers currently pay $25 per month for a quarter-acre plot.

But Tierra de Oportunidades is not just about raising produce. It's also about raising awareness. To that end, there are farm tours, harvest festivals, and other agricultural events. With a canoe organization housed right next door, boating (and fishing) is yet another option for visitors. A common part of Puerto Rican culture is to avoid cooking at home on weekends, choosing instead to attend a pig roast and bringing some of the food back home. TDO has now made this possible in their adopted city. Several pig roasts drew large crowds that also enjoyed Caballo Paso Fino, a fanciful horse demonstration. Many visitors, moved by this lush refuge right in their city (on a busline!), have been overheard exclaiming, "I feel like I'm back in Puerto Rico!"

One of the most exciting beacons for the future is the addition of 25 acres of adja-

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Growing Nuts

Continued from prev. page

the-Lake, Canada, has donated some 5,000 Carpathian (think English or Persian) seed Walnuts to our association. John Gordon stratified them in winter storage and some of these nuts were distributed to participants at the Saratoga Meeting last spring.

One thousand of these nuts were planted at Cornell University by NYNGA volunteers. They were germinated (better than 50% growth) in the green houses there, summered outside, and are now in cold storage waiting a spring 2006 planting. These nuts (Pappe, Combe, G3 ISU H24, Lake, and Harrison) came from Lane Ontario trees that we believe have cold hardiness, are late leafing, and may have Walnut Blight resistance.

A number are for sale through the Schlabach's Nursery, 2784 Murdock Road, Medina, NY, 14103. Write to them for a catalog listing these trees and their other orchard fruits and fruit growing products. A quantity of these trees will be planted at Cornell and at our Spring Meeting site at Trumansburg, northwest of Ithaca.

Some Carpathian Walnut seedlings will be available for distribution at that meeting. There will be a discussion of Eastern Filbert production, Butternut Blight studies, and the planting of our NYNGA Carpathian Walnut Orchard…our on-going research project and commitment to the continuation and expansion of nut-growing activities in New York State.

If you would like to know more about our organization, the Carpathian Project, or our May 6th meeting; contact the NYNGA at BWW Farm, 8144 Sears- burg Road, Trumansburg, NY 14886, Phone 607-387-4331 or email farmerjon2000@aol.com.

Jon Wertis is Vice President of NY Nut Growers Association and a retired public school educator. He and his partner Marian Pritchard run a 90-acre Boer meat goat operation in Trumansburg, NY.

Looking For English Walnuts

If you know of any "English Walnut" trees producing good tasting and good-sized nuts in NYS, please contact Jon Wertis at 607-387-4331. He is recording and mapping the location of these sources of quality genetic material.

NEW FARMERS

Trials and Tribulations of a New Grazer

By Billie Best

We purchased a pregnant cow and her weanling from a local grass farmer last July. Ruby is a three-year-old Red Angus. She was bred to a Rotokawa Devon twice, to produce her weanling and her unborn calf. We would like to raise Devons. Purchasing Ruby was a way to get into the red cow game without paying tourist prices for a heritage breed. You can look at Ruby and see that she is top quality meat, an excellent foundation for grass-farming genetics.

We planned not to name the weanling and for the few weeks we called her 64A. Then that got reduced to Ayla. We purchased our first movable electric fence and rotated Ruby and Ayla across a few acres of pasture. We had taken workshops with Joel Salatin, Ridge Shinn, Troy Bishopp and Sarah Flack. We have a few local grass farmers who mentor us, and we read Stockman Grass Farmer and Acres. A stack of books on grass farming sits on our coffee table.

But the day before Ruby was due, I was in a hurry. My brain cramped and I decided to move the cows from one paddock to another, even though there was a big gap in the fence connecting the paddocks. Hungry cows are going to go where the grass is greener, right?

Ruby came through the gate with Ayla right behind. She saw the gap, got a wild look in her eye, and took off right through the gap into the woods, with Ayla in tow. I would have never believed a cow loaded down with that much calf could run that fast, over rocks and fallen logs, through under brush and hedgerows. I raced to keep up with her, trying to head her off and turn her toward home, but she was determined to go deeper and deeper into the woods.

At one point we crossed a lane between fields and I could see my husband in the distance on the tractor. I waved frantically. He looked puzzled. Then he saw the cows and his face froze. He got a rope and a bucket of chicken feed and caught up with us in the car.

Cows that live on 100% grass don't think of grain as dessert. Ruby was not enticed by the chicken feed or whole corn. It took two of us two hours to chase those cows out of the woods and back into the main paddock. My clothes were torn, my face and arms and legs were all scratched up, my heart was pounding and my husband was angry. Then I sat down and read the part about cows getting sneaky, taking off and trying to hide when they are about to calf. Ruby calved the next morning.

I wish I could say that was the only mistake we've made. We bought weed hay in September at $2.00 a bale, and first cutting in October at $2.75 a bale — delivered and loaded into our barn. The goats loved the weed hay, and it makes good bedding, but

Ruby and her first-born. Photo by Jason Houston

the cows and the sheep will have none of it. We knew we did not have enough to make it through winter, but still in September, I passed up a chance to buy the rest we needed at $3.50 a bale, delivered, because I thought it was too expensive. In January we bought another hundred bales at $2.75, but we had to go get it and load it ourselves.

Hay shopping in February is embarrassing. Farmers know they have a newbie or a rich fool on the line. The price goes up by the week. Now we are talking about paying between $3.50 and $4.50 a bale for horse hay, and we may still have to go get it and load it ourselves. For that price we could fence a new pasture.

If we had a spare cow, we would have freezer beef instead of buying more hay. But we can't grow our herd if we eat them. We could get rid of the goats and the sheep, but then we would be back to brush cutting multiflora and mowing paddocks. We could call it quits, but we are hooked on the farming lifestyle. We see the value of using livestock to manage our land. We are romanced by the grass farming renaissance.

We have a gloomy view of our nation's future economy and we want to be more self-sufficient. We have paid a high price for our learning this year, and we intend to re-invest. Spring is just ahead, and on warm days we can smell the grass.

Billie Best is a beginning farmer in Chatham, NY. She is also Executive Director of the Regional Farm & Food Project, www.farmandfood.org.

Opportunity

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cent land in the next year or so. This would expand opportunities for farmers and visitors exponentially. Even better, Sisters of Providence, a community of Catholic sisters with a strong commitment to land stewardship, are planning to transfer the property to Nuestras Raíces.

A master plan for the new property, designed by farmers, youth, and community leaders, is already underway. The vision includes: a petting zoo, a greenhouse, a youth center, an expanded trail system, restoration of the native floodplain forest, a barn, pasture for horses, and a caretaker's house. At least ten farmers or teams of farmers are on the waiting list for one of the 5-acre plots. Although they are a long way from their native land, these farmers are forging deep attachments to the land where they now live, work, learn, recreate, and eat.

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Project manager Eric Toensmeier chats with Fermín Galarza of Galarza Family Farm at the farm site.